PlayStation®

cial Magazine

APRIL 2010

13
Luckiest number yet for **FINAL FANTASY?**
Read the review p. 65

APOCALYPSE WOW!
FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS
Stunning new sequel revealed

TRANSFORMERS
Finally! Back to Cybertron

RED DEAD REDEMPTION
Guns, whiskey, salvation

AvP
Humans too!

PlayStation – The Official Magazine Issue 31 (April 2010)

EXCLUSIVE REVIEW

GOD OF WAR III

BEAUTIFUL. BLOODY. BRILLIANT.

→ **BioShock 2:** Be the Big Daddy… or beat the Big Daddy. Rapturous!

+

Dante's Inferno
Medal of Honor
Lost Planet 2
MAG ▪ Lunar
Blur ▪ GTA
Battlefield: Bad Company 2
Super Street Fighter IV
Spec Ops

Future
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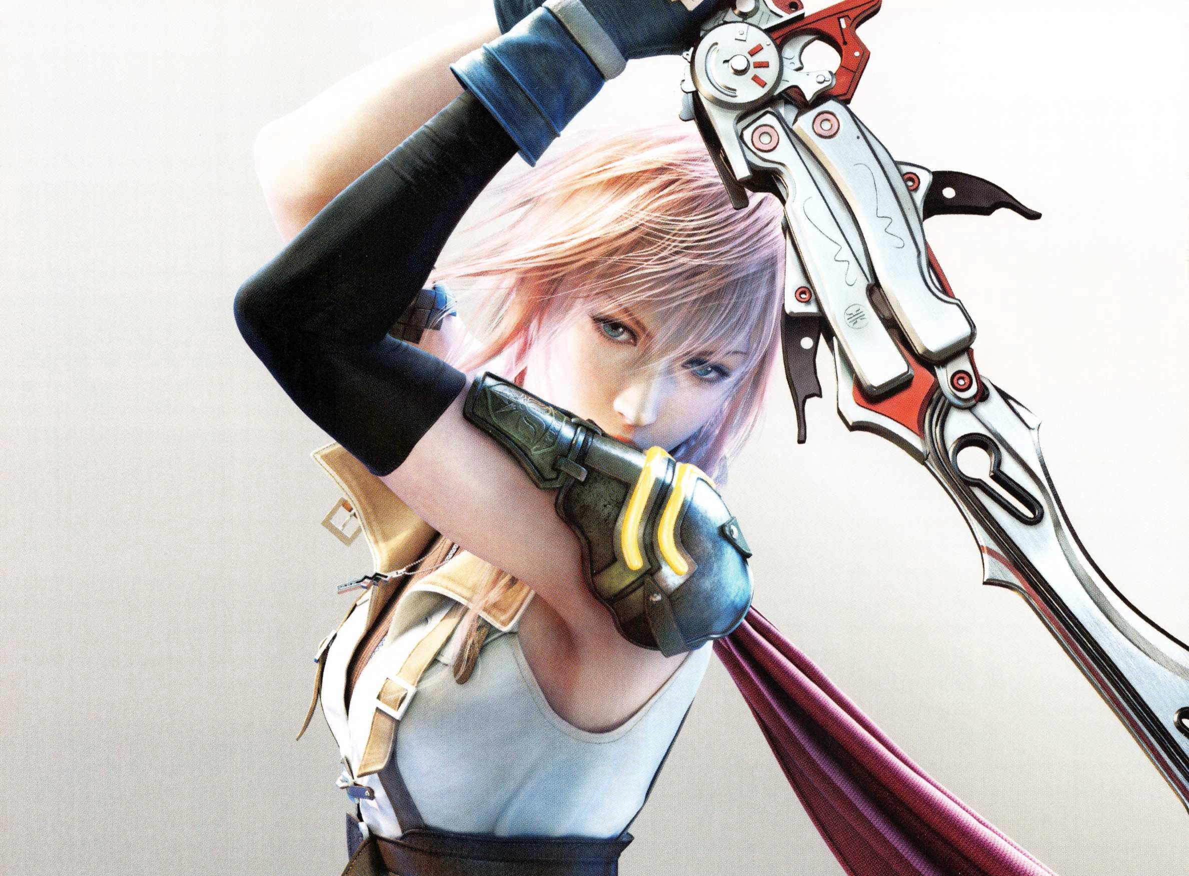

FINALFANTASYXIII.COM

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Mild Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence

PS3 PlayStation Network

XBOX 360 XBOX LIVE

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Chosen by destiny, six must choose between
saving mankind, and saving themselves.

THE BATTLE WITHIN BEGINS

FINAL FANTASY XIII

SQUARE ENIX

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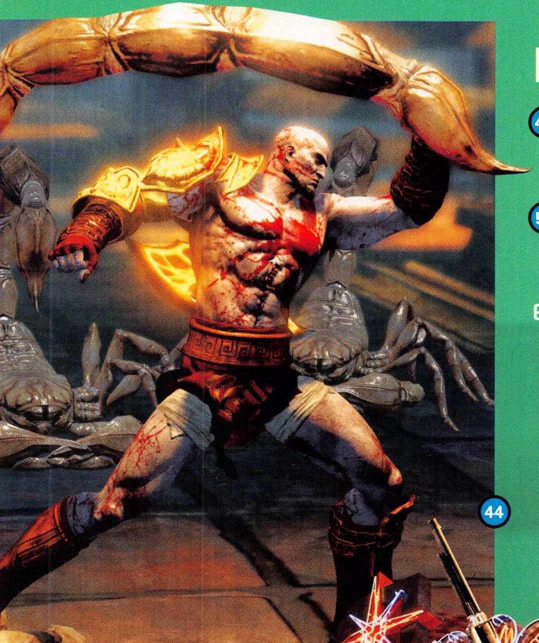
🟥 PlayStation 3 🟨 PlayStation Portable ☐ PlayStation Network 🟦 PlayStation 2



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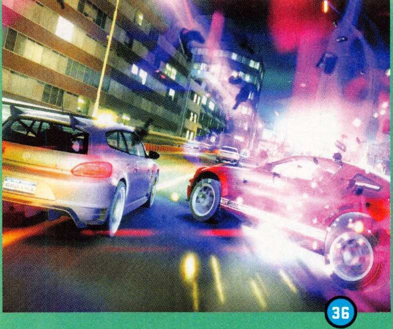

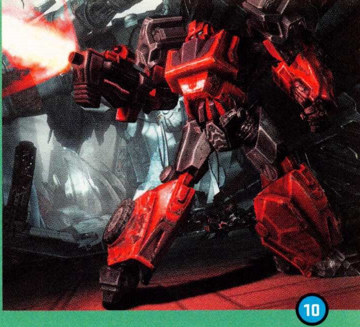

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ARCADE FIGHTSTICK
TOURNAMENT EDITION

→ Big Time

There's big. There's bigger. And then there's *God of War.*

To call it the biggest game on the PS3 might be the understatement of the year. When you're battling against a Titan who's twice the height of the Eiffel Tower—and you, at a measly seven-feet tall, are powerful enough to take the ancient god down—well, that's big stuff.

But it's not just the epic proportions that matter. Nor is it the epic awesomeness of the final game. (Though the latter, while wholly expected, is still great news.) *God of War III* is huge because of what it means to PS3 owners. Yes, it's March—but already we've had a tsunami of sublime first-party exclusives along with spectacular third-party gems. And to think, this is the time of year when we're usually trying to survive a gaming drought, doing everything we can to squeeze out the last drops of fun from those overripe holiday hits—but not so in 2010.

So forgive me if I sound like a broken record here, but for the third month in a row, I'm gonna say it: This is the year of the PS3. In this issue alone we've got reviews of *Final Fantasy XIII, MAG, Dante's Inferno, Battlefield: Bad Company 2,* and *Aliens vs. Predator*—all games worth your hard-earned cash. And then there's all those tasty treats to look forward to—including our exclusive peek at the new *Fallout,* along with extraordinary previews and hot scoops on games like *Red Dead Redemption, Transformers, Medal of Honor,* and *Blur.*

Great games make for great magazines. We had a ton of fun putting this one together. I hope you love reading it as much we loved producing it. Enjoy!

GARY

Gary Steinman | Editor in Chief
www.twitter.com/TinyManRages

The Team ↘

GARY STEINMAN
EDITOR IN CHIEF

In honor of *God of War III,* Gary has turned his bio into a quick-time event. Press X and he'll eviscerate Roger. Tap Circle and he'll delimbify Scott. Hold Square and he'll hug Greg. Because Greg really needs a hug.

NOW PLAYING: *God of War III, Final Fantasy XIII, Heavy Rain*

GREG ORLANDO
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Historians will be forever debating whether Greg was the world's premier super villain or its foremost authority on sock puppetry. And by history, we mean PTOM. Welcome aboard, Greg. Now get back to work!

NOW PLAYING: *BioShock 2, Lost Planet 2, Bayonetta*

KEN BOUSQUET
ART DIRECTOR

Ken is perhaps the finest man to be mentioned in this sentence. His halo of awesomeness warms the cockles of humanity's collective heart and, more importantly, lights PTOM's offices. We save electricity that way.

NOW PLAYING: *2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa, PES 2010,* and...*FIFA 10*

ROGER BURCHILL
MANAGING EDITOR

God of War III? Nary a peep from Roger. *MAG?* "Sorry, can't play. Gotta finish editing…" But when news of *DOA: Paradise* hit, he calls first dibs on the review. Shame has a new name and it's Roger

NOW PLAYING: *Dante's Inferno, Blur, Super Street Fighter IV*

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH
ASSISTANT EDITOR

As part of his *Fallout: New Vegas* feature, Scott tried to talk his way into a free trip to Vegas. Unfortunately, his Speech skill wasn't high enough, and he had to settle for a visit to Obsidian's offices in Orange County.

NOW PLAYING: *Fallout: New Vegas, MAG, BioShock 2*

THE DAVID MURPHY
EDITORIAL INTERN

Young intern David is proving surprisingly resilient to scaldings, and pokings with all manner of overly sharp objects laden with toxic spores. He wants everyone to know that although it hurts, he only bleeds on the inside.

NOW PLAYING: *Final Fantasy XIII, Heavy Rain, Super Street Fighter IV*

PlayStation
The Official Magazine

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THE TEN

Stories that everyone's talking about

Where's Megan Fox?!
And why it doesn't matter
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Gary and Greg push each other's buttons
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Crysis, Too

Too much Crysis is never enough

Billionaire playboy Tony Stark (aka Iron Man) wishes he could have a suit as cool as Crytek's Nanosuit 2.0. Stark also wishes he could star in a videogame that doesn't make him want to return his forlorn days as a rampaging alcoholic.

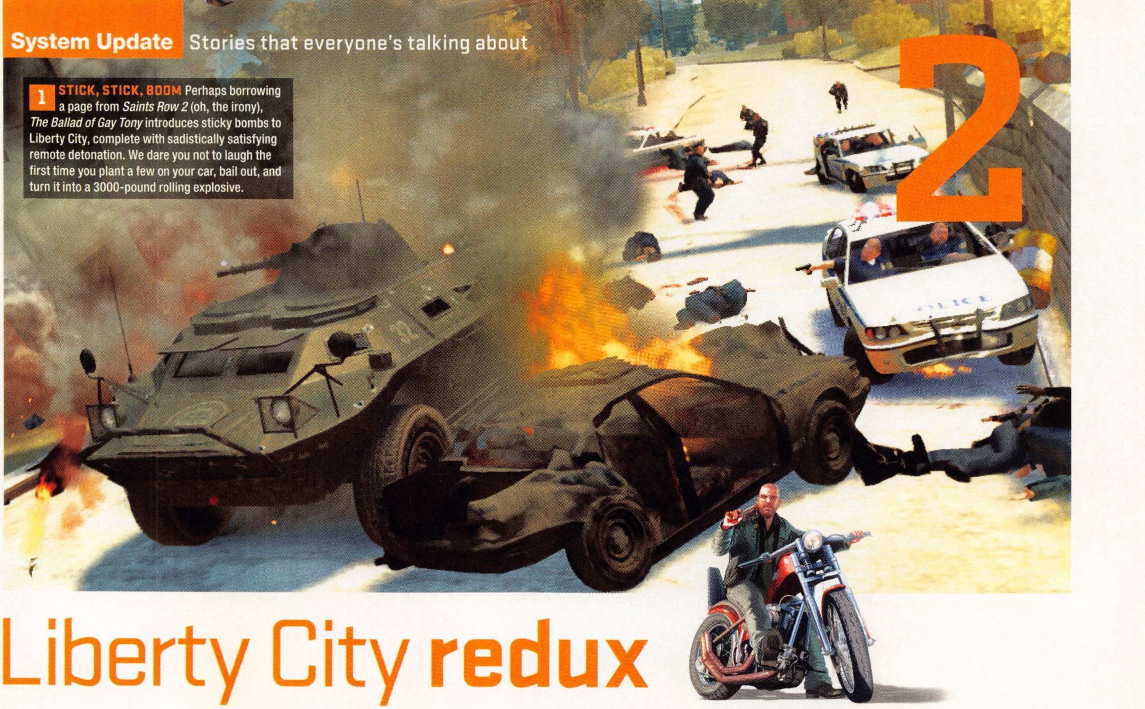
Sadly, wish fulfillment is not in Stark's future. But you, as the ultimate iron man, can live out destructive fantasies in *Crysis 2*. The game was our cover feature last month—and judging from your rabid response, you can't get enough. The good news? Neither can we.

The battlefield: a futuristic New York City. In your possession: perhaps the only functioning Nanosuit 2.0. As an armored ass-kicker, you'll be dropped into a three-way way war fought between a group of invading aliens, the megaconglomerate Crynet Systems, and yourself.

The Big Apple will seem instantly familiar to locals: To ensure accuracy, developer Crytek sent a team there to meticulously photograph landmarks. The results are evident; our sneak peek at an early build for *Crysis 2* featured an eerily accurate representation of everyone's favorite tourist trap, Times Square. Crytek will be fleshing out its New York with artistic flourishes such as electronic displays and vaguely futuristic architecture. This is, after all, a city of the not-too-distant (2023) future.

These sexy new *Crysis 2* screenshots illustrate another tantalizing aspect: beautifully rendered light-and-shadow effects. Crytek promises the game will look incredible on PS3—and if their PC legacy is any indication, they'll deliver.

1



1 STICK, STICK, BOOM Perhaps borrowing a page from *Saints Row 2* (oh, the irony), *The Ballad of Gay Tony* introduces sticky bombs to Liberty City, complete with sadistically satisfying remote detonation. We dare you not to laugh the first time you plant a few on your car, bail out, and turn it into a 3000-pound rolling explosive.

Liberty City **redux**

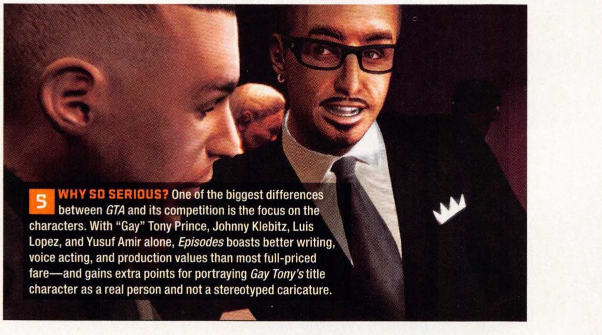
Five reasons to be stoked Rockstar is bringing the brilliant *GTA IV* episodes to PS3

Circle March 30 on your calendar. Besides celebrating National Doctors' Day (look it up!), you'll want to hotfoot it down to your nearest game store and pick up *Grand Theft Auto: Episodes from Liberty City,* a $40 disc that combines the excellent pair of 12-hour expansion episodes for Rockstar North's original 2008 masterpiece onto a single Blu-ray platter. Alternatively, if already own *GTA IV* on disc, you could simply download *The Lost and Damned* and *The Ballad of Gay Tony* for $20 each from PlayStation Network.

2 HOG WILD Long before *Sons of Anarchy,* it was *The Lost and Damned* that was making bikers cool again. The first *GTA IV* episode tweaks the motorcycle controls so that it's much harder to wipe out and, consequently, much easier to go *Road Rash* on some five-oh pig's skull at 50mph.

3 BECOME BATMAN Okay, not exactly, but *Gay Tony* not only integrates BASE jumping into some of its finest missions (i.e. cap an executive in a penthouse, break the window, jump out, and land on the back of a moving flatbed truck), it even offers it up as a minigame you can do from over a dozen different spots in Liberty City. I regret nothiiiiiiiiiiing!

4 FCC-YA! Both episodes add an abundance of salty new commercials, deejay bits, and TV programming. Watch more of the Republican Space Rangers spreading "values" as only they can, listen to Lazlow keep trying to pull himself out of the celebrity gutter, and reacquaint yourself with Fernando on the all-new Vice City FM station.



5 WHY SO SERIOUS? One of the biggest differences between *GTA* and its competition is the focus on the characters. With "Gay" Tony Prince, Johnny Klebitz, Luis Lopez, and Yusuf Amir alone, *Episodes* boasts better writing, voice acting, and production values than most full-priced fare—and gains extra points for portraying *Gay Tony's* title character as a real person and not a stereotyped caricature.

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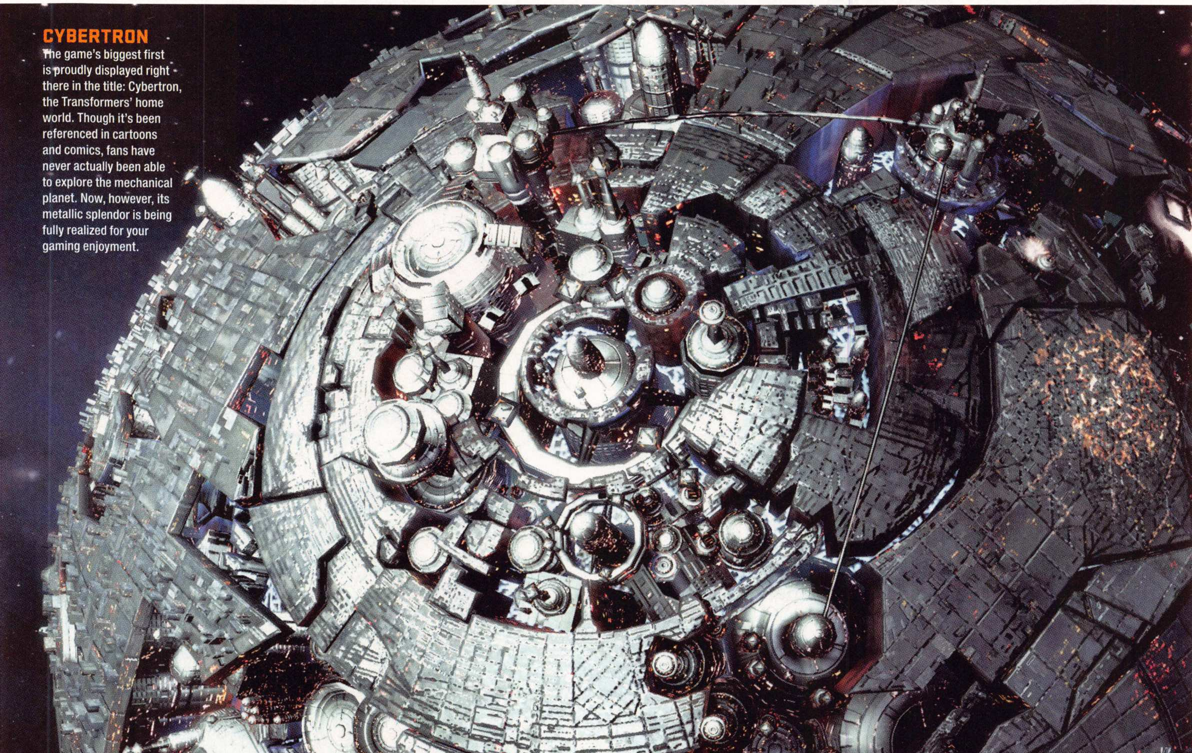
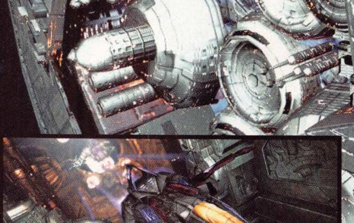


CYBERTRON

The game's biggest first is proudly displayed right there in the title: Cybertron, the Transformers' home world. Though it's been referenced in cartoons and comics, fans have never actually been able to explore the mechanical planet. Now, however, its metallic splendor is being fully realized for your gaming enjoyment.

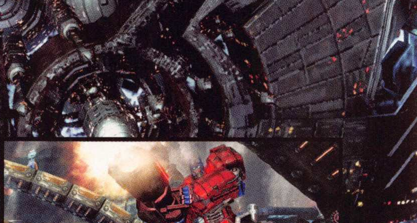


CO-OP

Hard to believe it took this long, but *War for Cybertron* will be the first *Transformers* game to offer a fully cooperative campaign mode. Every mission will allow you and two friends to thwart the Decepticons (or crush the Autobots) together online. We're also told that a competitive multiplayer mode will feature "personalization options." We can only hope this means we get to design our own bots.

BACK TO BASICS

Rather than trying to redefine gaming with an interesting but overly ambitious new play style, developer High Moon is focusing on a standard action-game formula and emphasizing execution over innovation. Powerful laser weapons, cover-based combat, and frequent, fluid transformations between vehicle and robot forms are all being refined so they'll feel "just right." Oh, and there'll be giant boss robots.



PREQUEL

The classic cartoon series depicted the conflict between the Autobots and the Decepticons that took place on Earth. *War for Cybertron* chronicles the battles that occurred *before* the two factions reached our planet. The game's storyline actually concludes where the cartoon's begins, and covers significant moments in Transformers history—including Bumblebee and Optimus' first meeting and why Starscream chose to become a Decepticon.

3

MAKEOVER

Unrestrained by a movie license, the game has stepped back from the "extreme" bot designs seen in the Michael Bay films, replacing them with a more classic look. Yes, the characters have been slightly modernized, but they're primarily inspired by the original cartoons and should deliver a healthy dose of nostalgia to every child of the '80s. In fact, Hasbro liked the new designs enough to produce a line of toys based on them. Expect to see them in stores right around when the game ships this summer.

4

To Kill or **Not to Kill?**

David Cage answers the tough questions about *Heavy Rain*

Sex! Violence! Murder! No, we're not talking about yet another gratuitous shoot-'em-and-loot-'em gore-fest. Instead, we're chatting with writer/director David Cage about his sophisticated adult thriller *Heavy Rain.* Despite its grand (and, in our esteemed opinion, successful) ambition to take videogames in a new direction, *Heavy Rain* has been surrounded by some rather traditional controversies. No stranger to controversy himself, Cage tackles all the major issues head on in our candid conversation.

Heavy Rain's plot features children in peril, which is pretty new for a videogame. Do you worry how the mainstream press might react to that sort of stuff?

Maybe I sound naïve about this, but no, I don't. When you write something or you develop a project like *Heavy Rain,* you don't write for the tabloids. If you were in that state of mind, you'd never do anything. So the first thing I wanted to do with *Heavy Rain* is write something I strongly believed in, and tell the story I needed to tell. It's not a game for kids, we've said that for two years, it's really obvious. And I think also the game is not shocking for the sake of being shocking. Nothing is gratuitous, and I think everything supports the narrative and the emotional immersion of the player.

But what about the nudity? It takes place in context of the story, but we'd be lying if we said we didn't find it titillating. Would you agree there's an element of titillation to the nudity?

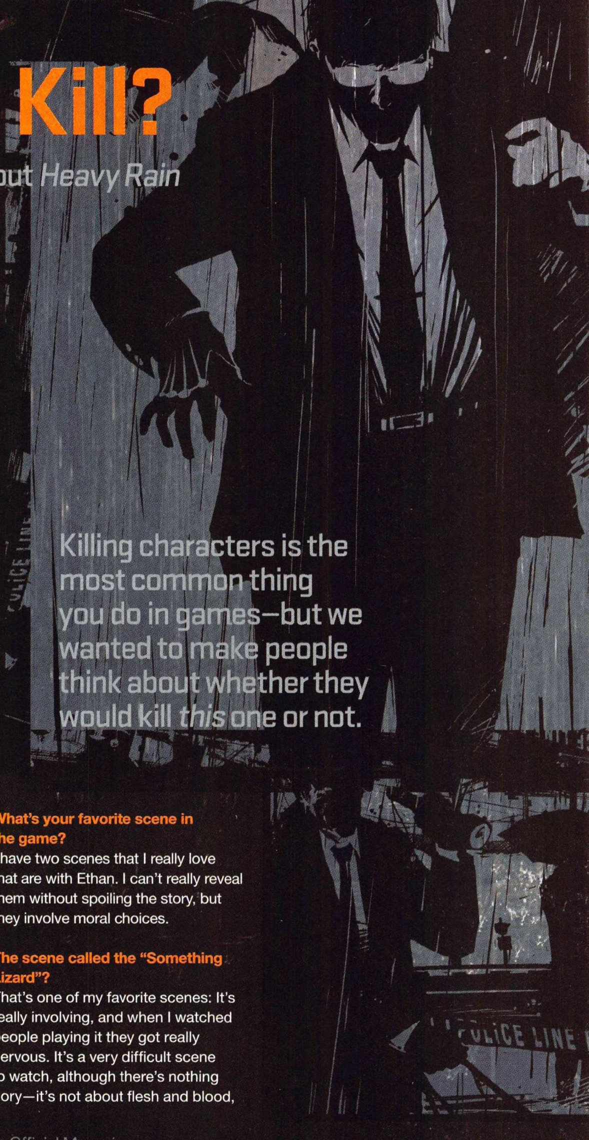
Honestly, I don't know. Were you shocked by it?

Not shocked. But, for instance in the first scene when you're controlling Madison, when she has her nightmare, she's walking around her apartment in her panties and her top. It's clearly meant to be a bit sexy...

As I writer I wanted to get rid of this so it's not in the way later in the story. I thought it was a very interesting way to start: showing the character naked because you show her vulnerable. She's fragile, she's vulnerable, she's naked—okay, now that's out of the way. You're part of her intimacy, you know her very well, and now you can get interested in who she is and why she acts that way and how she feels.

What influence do you expect, or hope, that _Heavy Rain_ will have on games and their approach to story in general?

Honestly you can't tell what impact you're going to have on other people's work. But I think the main message is that any story can be told with interactivity—the same way that any story can be told in cinema or in literature. I mean, you can talk about very serious matters, you can have people with drug addictions, suffering insomnia because of a trauma in the past, you can have a father losing his son… Personally I would expect the industry to stop telling stories about big heroes with big muscles saving the world or heroes facing hordes of zombies. I mean, okay, yeah, we can do that—now can we talk about more serious things?



> Killing characters is the most common thing you do in games—but we wanted to make people think about whether they would kill *this* one or not.

What's your favorite scene in the game?

I have two scenes that I really love that are with Ethan. I can't really reveal them without spoiling the story, but they involve moral choices.

The scene called the "Something Lizard"?

That's one of my favorite scenes: It's really involving, and when I watched people playing it they got really nervous. It's a very difficult scene to watch, although there's nothing gory—it's not about flesh and blood,

CONSEQUENCES ◎
MATURE ◎
SHOCKING ⊗
MORAL CHOICES △

it's really about the psychological idea of what this character is going to do. Another one I love is the trial where Ethan is supposed to kill someone. Killing characters is the most common thing you do in games—I don't know how many people I've killed in videogames since I've started playing but probably millions—but we wanted to make people think about whether they would kill *this* one or not. We wanted to give meaning to this action, and we realized in the user tests that probably 80-percent of the people *don't* shoot. And the last 20-percent, for most of them it was because they failed in the previous trials, so they didn't have a choice. But the most interesting thing I've seen is someone pausing the game at this moment, and he took a big breath, and said, "Okay, what am I going to do?" He was nervous about it! "Should I kill him? Should I not kill him?" It was a real dilemma. And that was so interesting, because the biggest disappointment for me would have been that he shoots him in the head and doesn't give a sh–t. That would have meant that we failed.

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MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Drug Reference
Language
Sexual Themes
Violence

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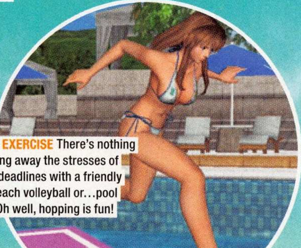
5

Off to **Paradise**

What we're planning to do during our *Dead or Alive: Paradise* vacation

The girls of *DOA* are coming to PSP. This March, the sexy stars of Tecmo's *Dead or Alive* series are off to the idyllic beach resort of New Zack Island for some well-deserved R&R from the rigors of martial arts combat and extreme volleyball tournaments. *Paradise* promises a scantily clad collection of gambling, minigames, and relationship management...all in the palm of your hands. No, we're not kidding. But since we have no shame, you can bet PTOM will be there to flirt, mingle, and play with the luscious ladies.

MAKE NEW FRIENDS Getting to know our fellow vacationers is our first priority. *DOA* series favorites Ayane, Christie, Helena, Hitomi, Kasumi, Kokoro, Lei Fang, Lisa, and Tina are all playable characters, along with newcomer Rio from Tecmo's Japan-only blackjack games.



GET SOME EXERCISE There's nothing like stripping away the stresses of magazine deadlines with a friendly game of beach volleyball or…pool hopping? Oh well, hopping is fun!

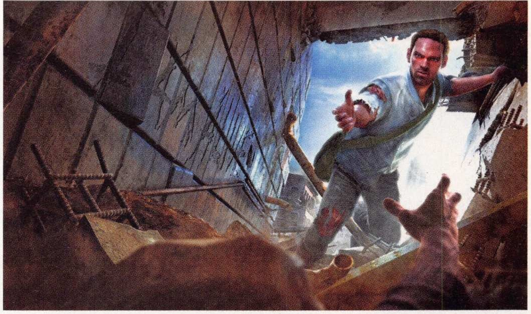
TAKE SOME CHANCES We're heading to the casino to try our luck at gambling games like blackjack, poker, and roulette. We'll try not to let the cute dealer distract us.

CAPTURE MEMORIES Time to get our creative juices flowing and take up photography. After all, what's a vacation without an album full of memories to enjoy over and over again?

CATCH SOME RAYS Better make some time to just hang out at the beach and have our new friends model the 100-plus bathing suits in the game: "Ooh, looks like you're burning. Did you want us to apply some sunblock?"

6 “We’re still working on it!” Yes, they are...

Get the hype machine rolling and sometimes it’s impossible to stop. Other times, the machine simply stalls and you have titles such as *Beyond Good and Evil 2* and *The Outsider* that get lost in development limbo. But we haven’t forgotten. No release dates—we know better—but here’s the breakdown on a handful of backburnered games that we know are still in production.



I AM ALIVE **PUBLISHER:** Ubisoft **DEVELOPER:** Ubisoft

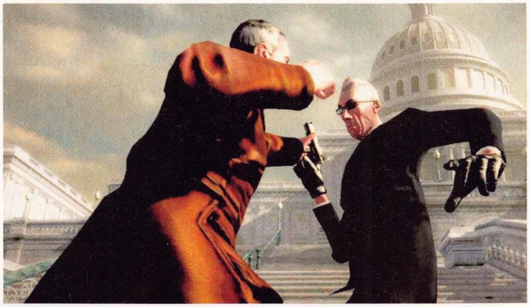
The basic assumption of *I Am Alive* is that you are, in fact, alive. And you will strive to remain such, even though the world has gone to hell courtesy of some apocalyptic natural disaster. Eminently mysterious, *Alive* offers survival horror in the first person, and may well be a western *Resident Evil.* Consider us curious.

HOMEFRONT **PUBLISHER:** THQ **DEVELOPER:** Kaos Studios

The homefront is the United States, the invaders are North Korean, and there’s only one thing that’s going to set things to rights: lots and lots of gunplay. The *Red Dawn* scenario is written by, go figure, the man who wrote *Red Dawn*—John Milius. Resistance is futile? There are some genuine holes in that particular theory. Bullet holes, that is.

L.A. NOIRE **PUBLISHER:** Rockstar Games **DEVELOPER:** Team Bondi

A stylish adventure, *L.A. Noire* offers murder, mayhem, and dames with sticks that go all the way to the ceiling. The graphics here take their inspiration from moodily lit Hollywood films—the style known as film noir—and, if nothing else, Rockstar’s patented combination of grit and adult material should make for a fine romp when the kiddies aren’t home.

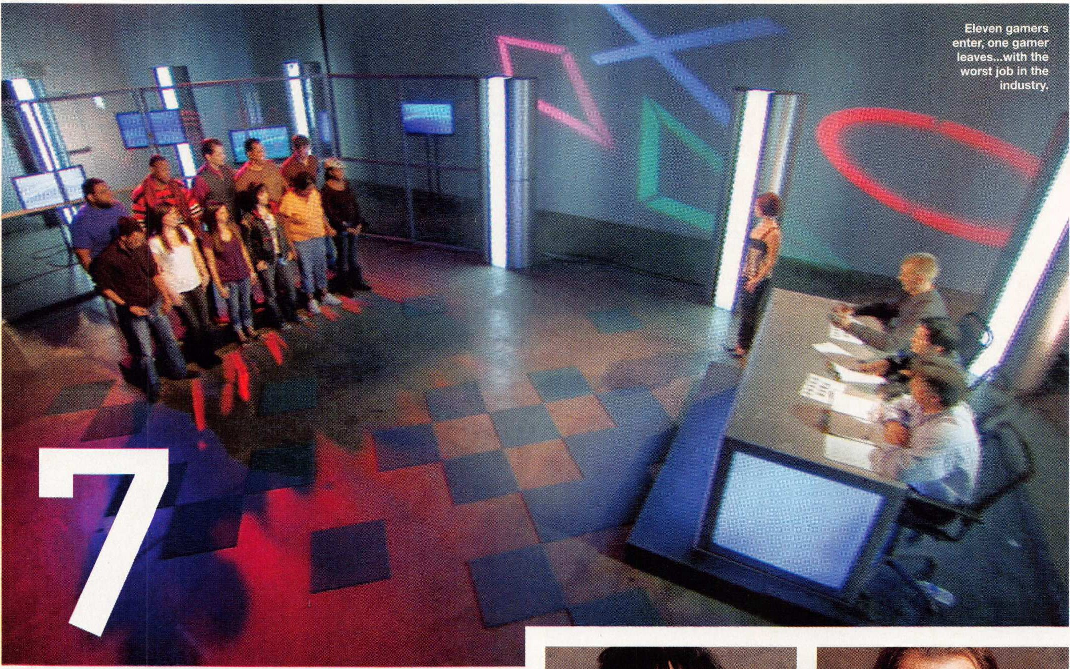


THE OUTSIDER **PUBLISHER:** Codmasters **DEVELOPER:** Frontier

John Jameson is having a really bad day. In fact, since he’s been framed for the murder of the President of the United States, it may be Jameson’s having the queen mother of all bad days. A third-person adventure, *The Outsider* asks some serious questions about our American democracy while simultaneously allowing players to blow the living hell out of anything that moves. This time, the revolution will be televised.

BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL 2 **PUBLISHER:** Ubisoft **DEVELOPER:** Ubisoft

The touching story of a female photojournalist and her porcine pal didn’t sell tremendously well the first time around, but it was generously lathered with awesome sauce. As an adventure, the game hit like Mike Tyson. As a story, it tugged at heartstrings like that other pig vehicle, *Babe.* We have forgiven you for not playing the original. Miss the sequel, and we’re sending the intern over to your house. And he’s been working out.



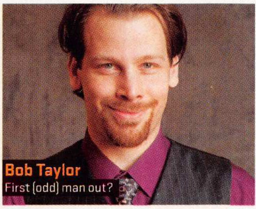
Eleven gamers enter, one gamer leaves...with the worst job in the industry.

7

Testimony

Sony stops being polite, and gets real

Ciji Thornton
Gamer gone wild.



Bob Taylor
First (odd) man out?

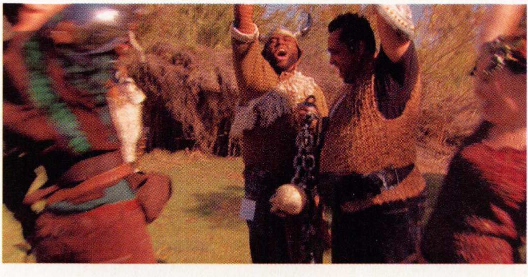
For those who have ever coveted a low-paying, occasionally mind-numbing, and oftentimes repetitive job offering little respect (and few opportunities for advancement), Sony debuted its produced-for-PSN series, *The Tester,* on February 18.

Tester brings together 11 game fans for a reality show in which the ultimate prize is $5,000 and a job in Sony's quality assurance division. The participants (each sporting a snazzy codename like "Nauseous," "Luge," and "Goof") compete in such game tester-related activities as dressing up in vaguely medieval garb to stab one another with plastic swords and comparing two sets of pictures to see what's different between them.

Careful what you wish for...

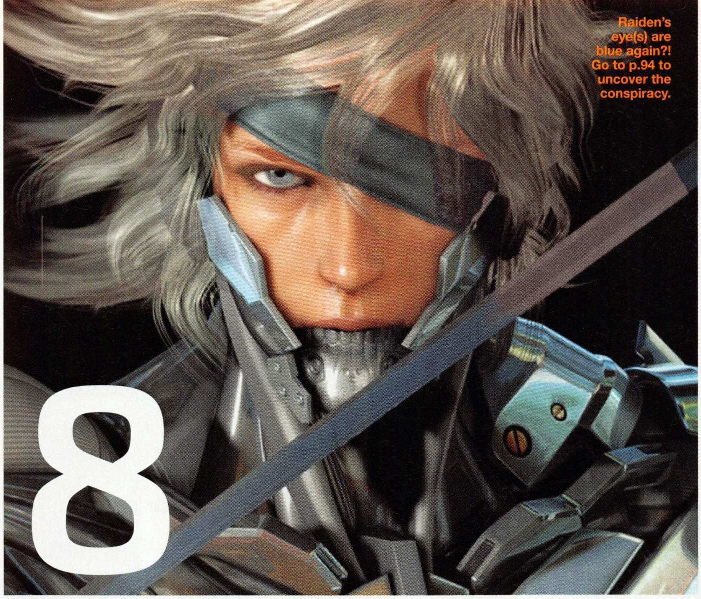
For the winner, a solid dose of reality is in order. Real-world testers make very little money and have even less job security. The role is considered a stepping stone to other positions in the game industry, but there are many more testers than there are open jobs. Only a few select testers will ever move up through the ranks to achieve their dream of a games industry career.

Of course, the job in itself is an exercise in tedium. It's a common misconception that testers just play games all day. Instead, testers are usually given *portions* of games to scrutinize: Errors in a game must be duplicated, documented, verified and, eventually, checked off a list to ensure they've been fixed. Testers also play the same game eight or more hours a day, five days a week (and possibly more as a game nears completion), sometimes for months on an end. Given the quality of some titles, this is a most depressing proposition indeed.



↑ This may be the most non-tester-related activity any human could devise.

→ We stand corrected about the above caption.



Raiden's eye(s) are blue again?! Go to p.94 to uncover the conspiracy.

8

Back from the Dead

An *MGS Peace Walker* promotional suit unveils Raiden's new look

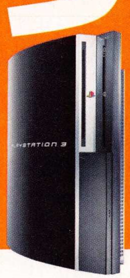
With Hideo Kojima's *Peace Walker* due out on PSP in just a few months, it can be easy to forget that another *Metal Gear Solid* game—*MGS Rising*—is also deep in development for PS3. Fortunately, the fine folks at Kojima Productions saw fit to remind us...by hiding a new piece of character art within its cleverly titled online puzzle game Piece Walker (which you can personally check out at www.konami-piecewalker.jp).

The new image is a slight reworking of the original Raiden art released when the game was announced at last year's E3. The *Sons of Liberty* star definitely looks a lot less undead now, with blue eyes, matted hair, and some actual color in his cheeks. It's possible the team wanted Raiden to appear a little less badass and a little more human and relatable. Konami hasn't released any other info about *Rising,* but we'll be sure to bring you up to speed as soon as they start talking.

9

BrainStation

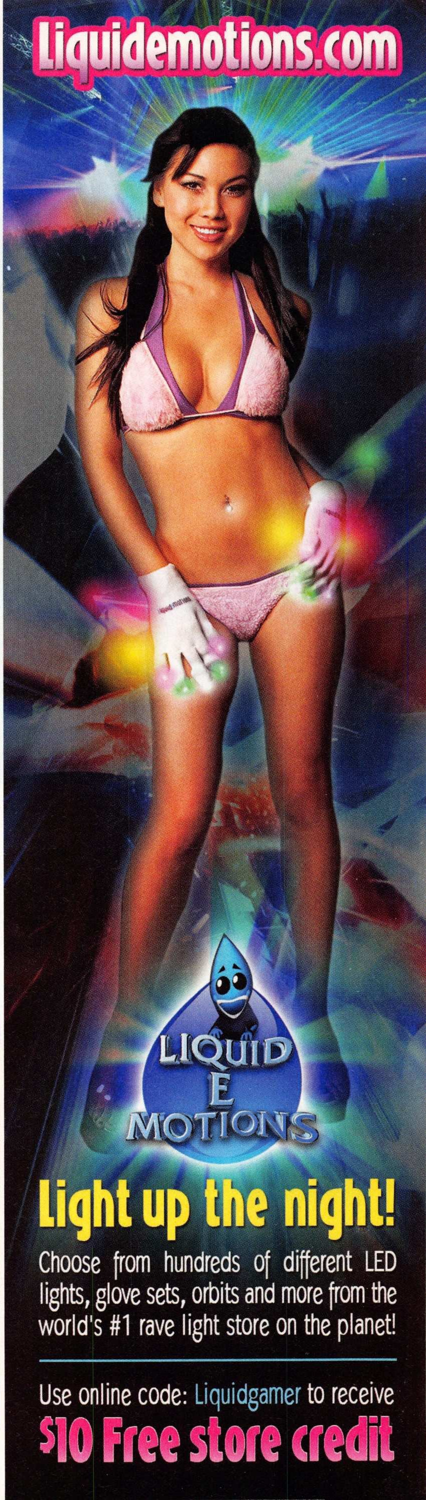
2,000 PlayStations fly off into the wild blue yonder



In yet another example of your tax dollars hard at work, the U.S. Air Force plans to link 2,000 PlayStation 3 game consoles to create a supercomputer—not meant, apparently, to run the world's largest *Warhawk* multiplayer session.

The military's newspaper publication *Stars and Stripes* reports the Air Force plans to put the PS3s to work performing various studies. One of these studies centers on neuromorphic computing which, according to *Stripes*, "mimics human nervous systems." Mark Barnell, the lab's high performance computing director, is quoted as saying: "In a general sense, we are interested in making [the supercomputer] autonomous."

The project, inexplicably not named Skynet, is funded with $2 million in grant money.



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UGSAM
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DAILY BUGLE

Spider-Man says: "With great power comes...awful QTEs?"

10 Do quick-time events ruin immersion?

PTOM's top buttonmashers hash it out

YES

says the bludgeon curmudgeon

Greg Orlando

History will record the quick-time event as the second worst "advancement" in the medium of videogames, topped only by access to in-game chatting made possible by the widespread distribution of microphones to the intellectually bereft.

Developers love quick-time events. It lets them blend gameplay with a scripted movie action sequence. At once, players can be the Amazing Spider-Man dodging debris in a grimy New York City subway, or *Shenmue's* Ryo Hazuki pursuing a felon through crowded Japanese streets.

QTEs are meant to be a visual reward, but players aren't even looking at what's going on in the game—they're simply staring at the portion of the screen where the button prompts come up. It's a wholly artificial mechanic that's never representative of the action at hand. That's not gaming, that's being a trained chimp staring at a monitor and pushing buttons in sequence.

NO

says the prompt and powerful

Gary Steinman

When they're done wrong, they're terrible. That much I'll grant to my grumpy friend on the left.

But done right? Quick-time events let me pull off moves I'd never be able to accomplish given the necessary limitations of a game's control scheme. When I punch a Gorgon in the face, perhaps she'll recoil a bit while nursing her smooshed nose. But when I'm ready to finish her off after a heated battle, I only have so many buttons at my disposal—and none of them are mapped to "rip her head off by stomping on her tail while tugging at her serpentine hair." That's why I'm more than happy to seek out the right prompt, then tap away en route to bloody victory.

Think of it as my reward for a job well done. Or a way to make me feel even more powerful than I could if I were simply hacking/shooting/walloping away. In other words: I did this, and it feels good.

June 15-17, 2010 * Los Angeles Convention Center * E3Expo.com

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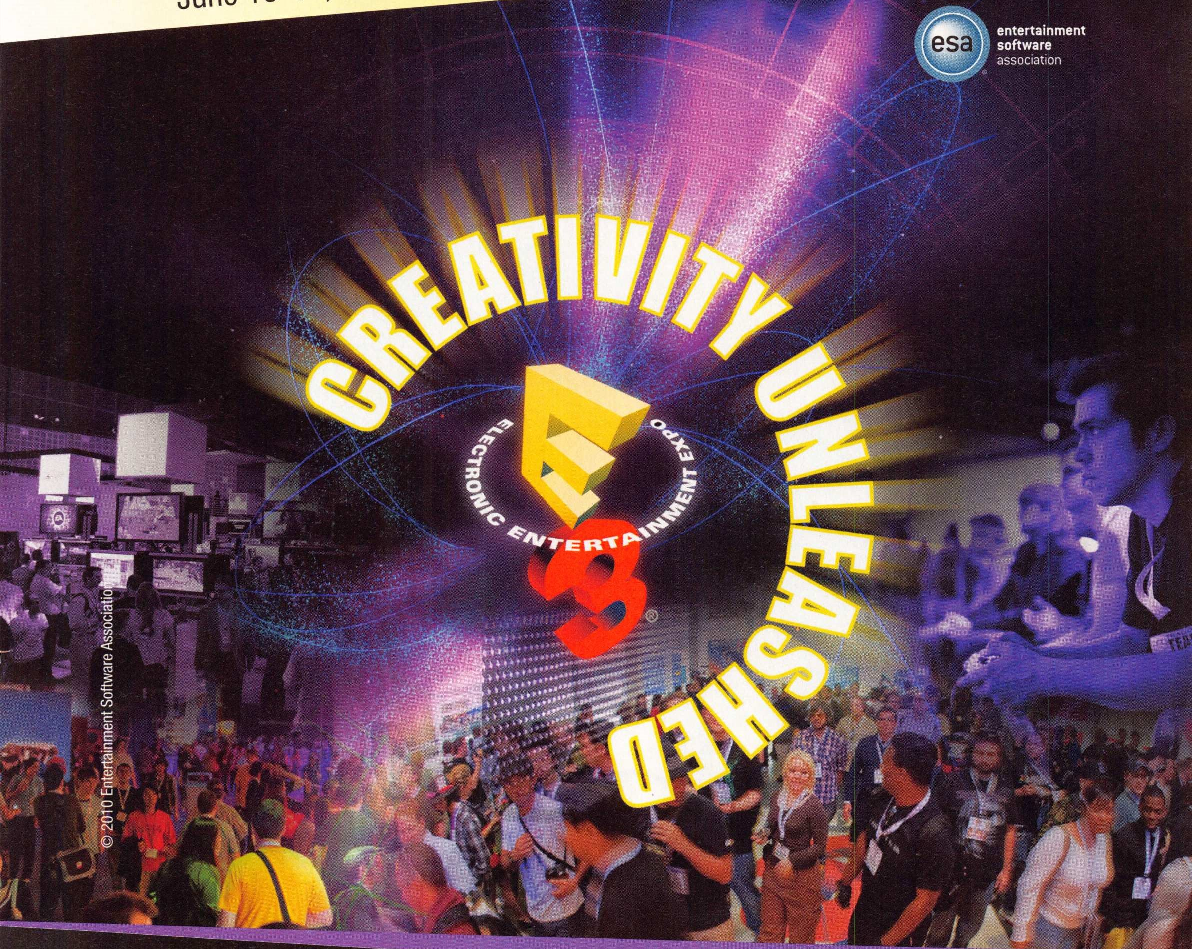

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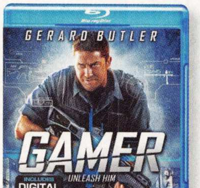
2-DISC SPECIAL EDITION
BRAD PITT
INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS
A FILM BY QUENTIN TARANTINO

Inglourious Basterds

PRICE: $39.98 RATED: R

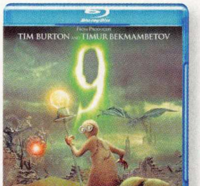
Although very different in content and scope than his other films, *Inglourious Basterds* is still pure Quentin Tarantino. On the surface, it looks like a quirky, brutal WWII action flick featuring a hickified Brad Pitt leading a group of badass Jewish Nazi killers. But like most things Tarantino, it goes a lot deeper than that. In fact, as the movie progresses, Pitt and his crew continually take a back seat to an ever more complicated and labyrinthine plot. Strangely, the controversy over violent content is incredibly overblown as the movie is easily one of the director's best and most mature films. Granted, when violence hits, it hits hard, but for the most part there's a notable *lack* of action. The presentation is phenomenal as well, with an especially terrific soundtrack. It's disappointing that there's no commentary included, but a slew of other generally excellent extras make it a worthy collectable. Still, considering the quality of the film, it's almost certain that a more comprehensive special edition will emerge at some point in the future.


Blu-ray Disc
GERARD BUTLER
GAMER
UNLEASH HIM
INCLUDES DIGITAL COPY
FOR MAC AND PC
Works with iTunes

Gamer

PRICE: $39.99 RATED: R

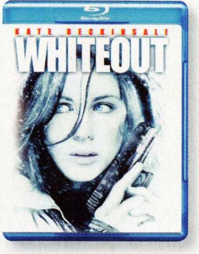
Listening to the lackluster, meandering commentary of the writer/director duo Neveldine and Taylor, you'd think *Gamer* was created by a couple of stoner frat boys. And maybe it was, but the end result is stylish, grimly violent, and entertaining. The movie does a superb job of presenting the disparity between the world of the brutal murder-spectacle game's fans and the reality for its remotely controlled death-row inmate players. Throw in a gleefully crazy Michael C. Hall (Showtime's *Dexter*) as a hilarious bad guy, a musical number, and the directors' creativity and engaging cinematography and *Gamer* is, ironically, the best videogame movie out there.


Blu-ray Disc
From Producers
TIM BURTON and TIMUR BEKMAMBETOV
9
"A Stunningly Original Animated Masterpiece"

9

PRICE: $39.98 RATED: PG-13

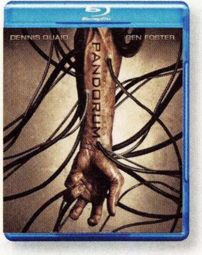
Bizarre, creative, and a little perplexing, *9* seems a computer-generated melding of *LittleBigPlanet* and the *Terminator* movies. The movie is purely an exercise in style over substance though, as the lackluster plot makes very little sense overall. But it hardly seems to matter when you're watching sack-men battle the robots responsible for humanity's destruction, since the gorgeously dark style and apocalyptic scenes are so engrossing and fun. Aside from a beautiful presentation, the disc offers up some great extras, including the original indie short and excellent commentary.


KATE BECKINSALE
WHITEOUT

Whiteout

PRICE: $35.99 **RATED:** R

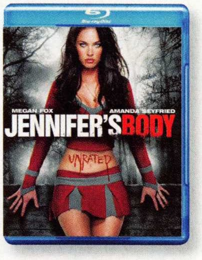
− *Whiteout's* premise of a serial killer on the loose in Antarctica is a superb idea smudged by a frequently mediocre script. When the movie works, it's easy to go along for the ride, but there are too many cheap clichés here to make it a seriously recommendable flick. The movie suffers from unnecessary flashbacks and breaks in logic, but still manages to make good use of the location and the ever-gorgeous Kate Beckinsale. While the picture and sound are excellent, there's also a real lack of meaty extras. Still, it's worthy of a rental on a slow night.


DENNIS QUAID
BEN FOSTER
PANDORUM

Pandorum

PRICE: $39.98 **RATED:** R

+ While it's not in league with *District 9, Moon*, or *Sunshine*, and has a distinct B-movie vibe, *Pandorum* manages to mix psychological horror with cannibal mutants to create a surprisingly dark and involving tale. The look and pacing of the movie will be especially appealing to fans of the game *Dead Space*, particularly the grimy and claustrophobic look of the spaceship locale. The disc itself is top notch, and there are some interesting extras as well, including plenty of backdrop material and decent commentary.


MEGAN FOX
AMANDA SEYFRIED
JENNIFER'S BODY
UNRATED

Jennifer's Body

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** R/UNRATED

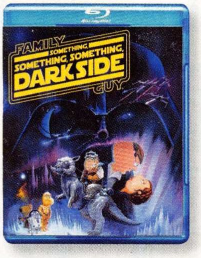
+ *Jennifer's Body* might have been promoted as a teen-aimed supernatural slasher, but in reality it's a remarkably funny black comedy that's not so much aimed at teens as it is at making fun of them. The horror elements are the weakest part of the film, partially because Megan Fox simply isn't good for much more than eye candy. Thankfully, she isn't the lead and the sly humor (it was written by *Juno* scribe, Diablo Cody, after all) proves enough to compensate for the weaker links in the film. Not a great movie by any means, but this *Body* isn't nearly as bad as you might have heard.

RICKY GERVAIS
JENNIFER GARNER
JONAH HILL
LOUIS C.K.
ROB LOWE
TINA FEY
THE INVENTION OF LYING
FROM THE CO-CREATOR OF THE OFFICE
"I'M JUST TOO FAR OUT OF YOUR LEAGUE"
"YOUR BABY IS SO UGLY IT'S LIKE A LITTLE RAT"
"YES, THAT DRESS MAKES YOU LOOK FAT"
"'THE INVENTION OF LYING' IS A REMARKABLY RADICAL COMEDY."

The Invention of Lying

PRICE: $35.99 **RATED:** PG-13

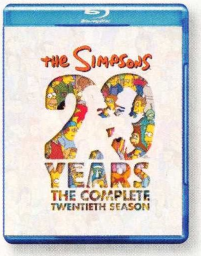
+ Ricky Gervais is always a joy to watch, even when he's surrounded by clichés. Such is the case with *The Invention of Lying*. Gervais wrote, directed, and stars in a comedy about the only man capable of lying in a world that not only lacks untruths, but also irony, sarcasm, and all the other wonderful bits of wordplay we take for granted. At times, the movie is comic brilliance—such as where Gervais' bewildered writer character accidentally invents religion. Unfortunately, there's also a lame and unconvincing romantic comedy element involving Jennifer Garner. The movie is still worth watching, but it would have been grand had Gervais gone much farther down a darker, more comedic path.


FAMILY GUY
SOMETHING, SOMETHING, SOMETHING, DARK SIDE

Family Guy Presents: Something, Something, Something Dark Side

PRICE: $29.99 **RATED:** UNRATED

+ *Family Guy* addicts will undoubtedly rejoice at the latest straight-to-video *Star Wars* parody from their favorite dysfunctional animated family. Merely curious viewers will likely be entertained as well—there are so many machinegun-fire jokes here that the laughs are plentiful. Unfortunately, the episode doesn't even scratch the hour mark, and while the commentary is entertaining, the dearth of extras is disappointing. Still, diehard *Family Guy* aficionados and casual fans alike can agree there's no shortage of comedy gold here.


THE SIMPSONS
20 YEARS
THE COMPLETE TWENTIETH SEASON

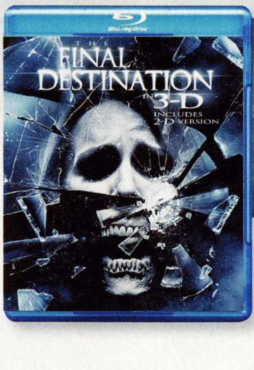
The Simpsons: The Complete Twentieth Season

PRICE: $59.99 **RATED:** UNRATED

+ It's hard to believe that it's been two decades since the first roughly animated, brilliantly creative original episode of *The Simpsons* aired. It's even harder to believe that the 20th season (and the first to hit Blu-ray) is still so funny. Barely a step has been missed in Springfield this season, and these 21 episodes have plenty to love. The show is bold and colorful in HD, and packed onto two discs. If there's a complaint with the package, it's the near void of special features.

Cavalcade of the Craptacular

Yes, they're bad—really bad—but entertainment gold for cinema rubberneckers who enjoy witnessing the carnage.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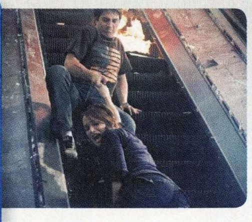
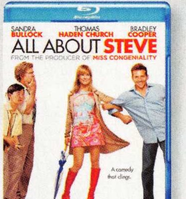


The Final Destination

PRICE: $35.99 **RATED:** R

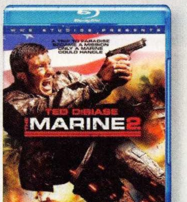
If only. The latest in the line of pointless death movies might be in 3D, but it's as one dimensional as the first three.


SANDRA BULLOCK
THOMAS HADEN CHURCH
BRADLEY COOPER
ALL ABOUT STEVE
FROM THE PRODUCER OF MISS CONGENIALITY
A comedy that clings.

All About Steve

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** PG-13

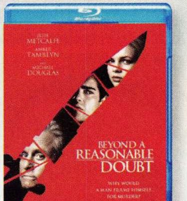
The quintessential girl-next-door Sandra Bullock as a nerdy stalker... Time to move out of the neighborhood.


TED DIBIASE
THE MARINE 2

The Marine 2

PRICE: $29.99 **RATED:** R

With a script slightly above an average episode of the *A-Team*, we can only hope and pray that there isn't a third.


JESSE METCALFE
AMBER TAMBLYN
MICHAEL DOUGLAS
BEYOND A REASONABLE DOUBT

Beyond a Reasonable Doubt

PRICE: $34.98 **RATED:** PG-13

Despite Michael Douglas' billing on the box, he's barely in this banal, nonsensical mess of a legal thriller.

Questions, comments, rants, raves about our Blu-ray reviews? Email Jason D'Aprile at **PTOM_Bluray@futureus.com.**

MUST DESTROY THE TOWER.

one insanely mean and pissed off tower. that'll

BADASS BOSSES

Put your skills to the test against huge, vicious enemies.

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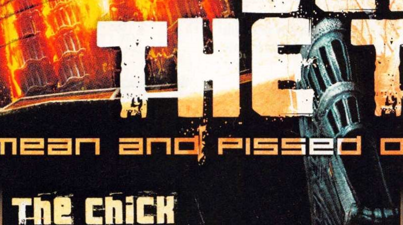

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> – *“Pancho”*

MEDAL OF HONOR

The "real" modern warfare

PS3 AVAILABLE: Q4 GENRE: Shooter PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: EALA, DICE

Quick: Think of a military shooter franchise, and what's the first thing that comes to mind? Yep, *Call of Duty.* But before that series leapt into modern-day conflicts—and up to its unassailable position atop the best-seller lists—there was the superb *Medal of Honor,* a once-proud franchise now all but cast aside as a World War II has-been.

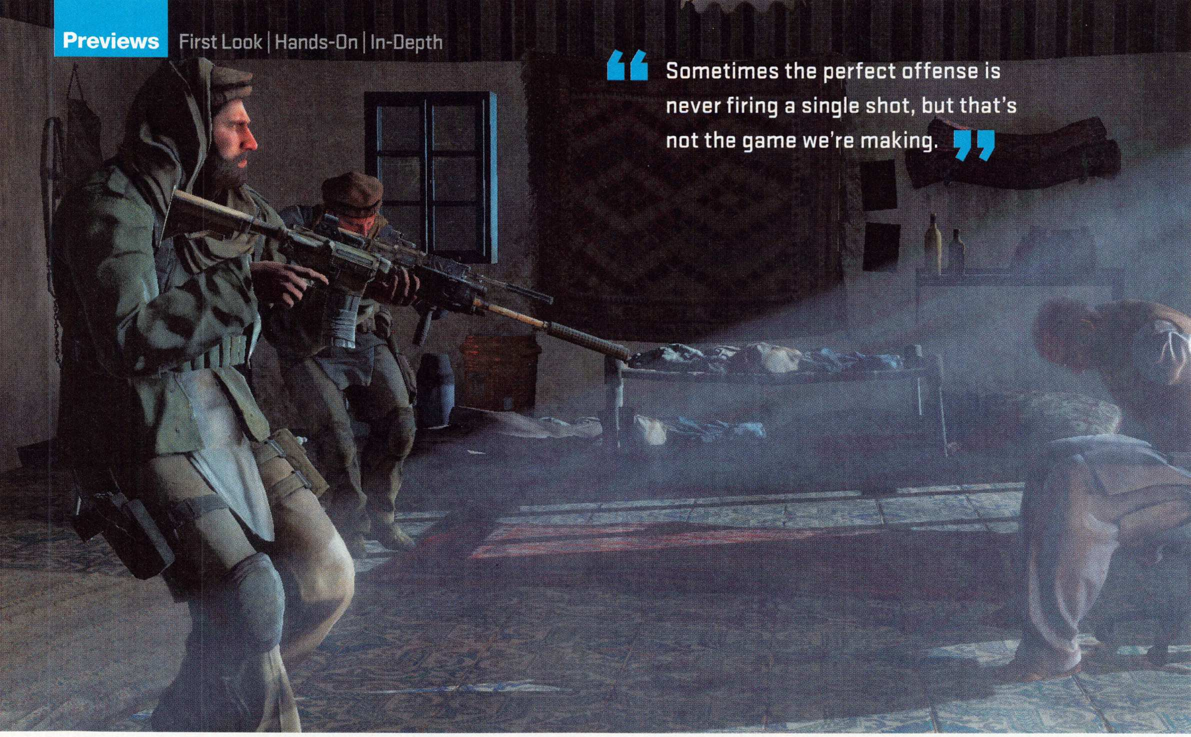
If we were EA—keepers of the franchise that blazed a trail in military action gaming—we'd be pissed that our thunder was stolen and itchin' to get back in the fight. And this modern reboot of the franchise is exactly how they're launching the counteroffensive.

The all-new *Medal of Honor* doesn't mess around with subtitles or sequel numbers; this is a totally new effort that aims to capture some of the magic that made *Allied Assault's* debut one of the most memorable entrances in gaming history. In the spirit of pulling no punches, EA has reached out to a military organization so bathed in testosterone-charged badassery that its consultants wore balaclavas to mask their identities while talking to us. That's our scary introduction to Tier 1 Operators.

Who? These are the guys (allegedly—no official government or military outlets comment on their role) who are the cream of the Special Forces crop. Alpha personalities collected in tight groups inserted into dangerous situations to perform critical missions.

We tried to prepare for our meeting, but our attempts to research the Tier 1 Operators turned up zilch. Not a damn thing we could use for background. That, of course, was a question in itself to pose to these larger-than-life consultants, and it could join the list of suggested questions we received in advance of the meeting. That document also included a long list of off-limit queries: those that might be tasteless or, more crucially, impossible to answer for national security reasons. See, these guys are still active members of the U.S. military (from what branches, at what ranks, in which areas of operation, or with what specialties…all unknown) with full veto power over in-mission situations the game's developers are crafting.

"They can walk at any time," says EALA [EA Los Angeles] executive producer Greg Goodrich. "They're still out there in the fight; this is what they do. When they're in the room you feel their presence, you just get it."



> “Sometimes the perfect offense is never firing a single shot, but that’s not the game we’re making.”

A new allied assault

Afghanistan is still immediate and painful to many. Good news about operations against al-Qaeda on that front is hard to come by. But *Medal of Honor* is more than willing to take on that hostile terrain head on. In fact, the game goes even further, bringing us into the mountains, plains, greenery, and lush environments native to a country that many Americans view as arid and inhospitable.

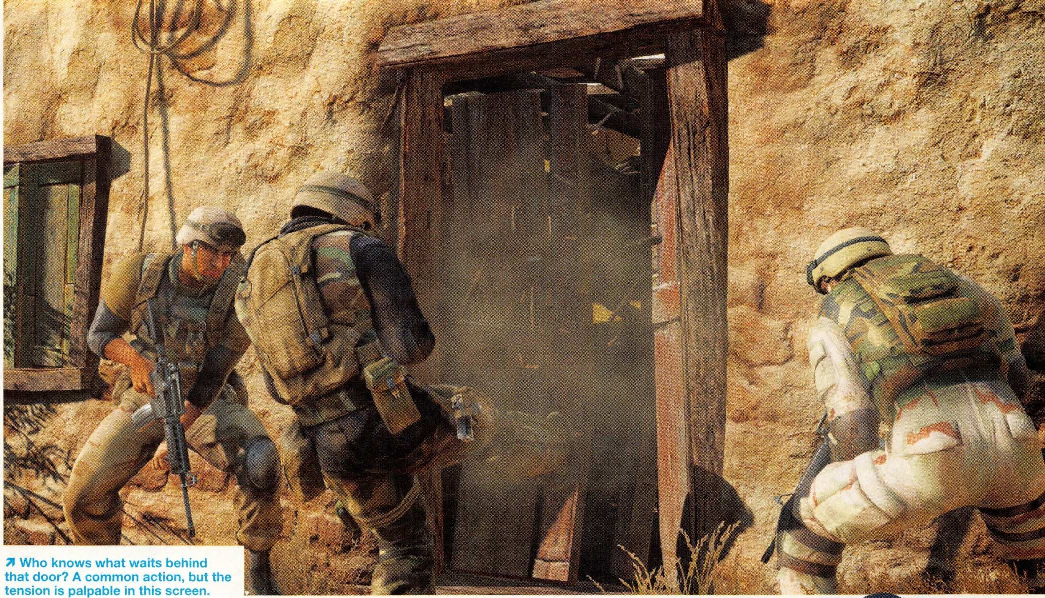
The first mission we saw, however, was set in the battle-ravaged city of Gardez (southeast of Kabul, toward the Pakistan border). Though it was identified with a specific date in our session, Goodrich tells us that the missions—be they the big military ops familiar to the *Call of Duty* veteran or smaller forces starring the Tier 1 Operators—won’t reference specific dates or operations.

“We have to embellish a bit,” says Goodrich, explaining the lack of specificity. “Sometimes the perfect offense is never firing a single shot, but that’s not the game we’re making. So we’re taking from that big basket of experiences and choosing the ones that fit the best for our game.” In relation to these Tier 1 Operators, that means representing the way they work as a team and, as creative director Rich Farrelly explains, “the lengths these guys will go to for one another…that’s a big part of our narrative.”

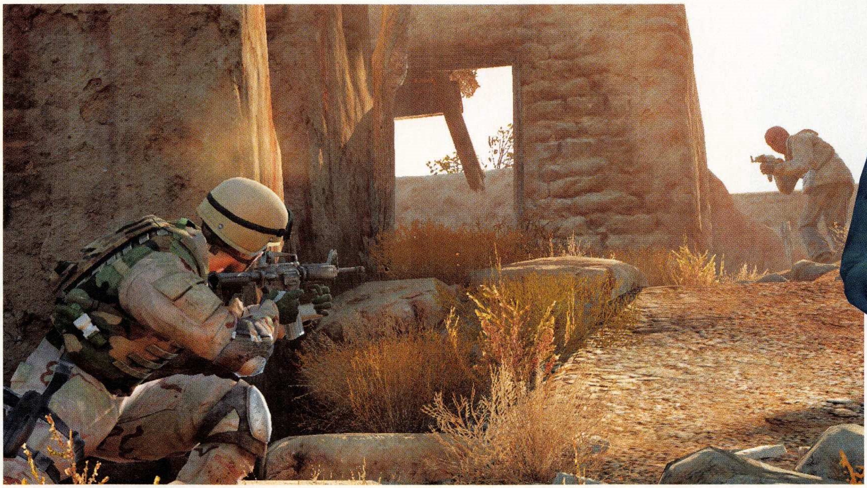
↖ *Medal of Honor* will offer a glimpse of what U.S. Forces in Afghanistan face every day.

Private military consultants

When the three consultants—codenamed “Vandal,” “Coop,” and “Pancho”—walk into the room wearing regular civvies plus distracting balaclavas, we can’t help but tense up a bit. Their presence is palpable. And yet we’re struck by an odd feeling: part cynicism that these obscured soldiers could be well-rehearsed actors playing a smoke-screen role, part awe at their massive size, part respect for their professed dedication. When they explain their



↗ Who knows what waits behind that door? A common action, but the tension is palpable in this screen.



commitment to the causes ultimately dictated by politicians, we can't help but take them seriously. "I believe in what we're doing… I believe we're making the world a safer place," says Vandal with a tone so earnest, we have to accept it as the truth.

For the development team, it's all awe and inspiration. "After one of their [consulting] sessions you literally see [members of the development team] pick up their own game," says Goodrich.

"It builds a strong esprit de corps, people are more proud of what they're doing, and are emboldened to do better," Farrelly chimes in.

"When you come back from a session and say 'this is my job, and *I'm* going to be the best at it today'…it sounds silly, but it's true. It has changed individuals and how they work," Goodrich adds.

That energy is now focused on creating a single-player action experience to compete in a market dominated by one major player. Goodrich describes a game format that involves playing as several characters (a U.S. Army Ranger and an Apache pilot in the "big military" explosive set-piece missions, and a to-be-revealed number of Tier 1 Operators in small-scale precision attack encounters). Between streets strewn with the detritus of guerilla warfare, fields hiding al-Qaeda forces (Goodrich confirms that the terror organization will be called out by name), smash-and-grab raids, and massed force assaults, developer EALA is promising a diverse experience grounded in the actual encounters and knowledge of elite special forces operatives.

If you're going to stake a claim for regaining a sought-after mantle, this is how you do it. | Rob Smith

↑ Roll the DICE

The EALA studio responsible for the single-player *Medal of Honor* experience will keep its attention focused entirely on that mode, while multiplayer experts DICE handle the crucial online modes. You may know DICE as the pioneers of explosive multiplayer military games like the *Battlefield* series. Handing this outfit the keys to the *Medal of Honor* franchise makes perfect sense—picking ideal horses for specific courses. Not a lot of detail about the plans or modes has leaked out, so speculate away, but we'll have to wait a bit longer to get the scoop.

LOST PLANET 2

Paradise lost, shooting found

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** May **GENRE:** Third-person shooter **PUBLISHER:** Capcom **DEVELOPER:** Capcom

As a general rule of thumb, people who name celestial bodies should reserve "Eden" and all its clever alternate forms (such as *Lost Planet 2's* E.D.N. III) for planets devoid of sub-zero wastelands, killer space pirates, and huge human-chewing bugs. It is, then, ironic that E.D.N. III again plays host for Capcom's delightful third-person antics, by which we mean gunplay. The planet, with its hostile inhabitants and endless environmental hazards, is about as close to a paradise as, say, *Porky's Revenge* is to a Cannes film festival award winner.

Ten years have passed since the events of *Lost Planet: Extreme Condition.* The bad guys are still shooting at the rebellious snow pirates, only now they're doing it in E.D.N. III's newly revealed jungle terrains. The alien Akrid are still swarming over the planet—with vulnerable parts conveniently highlighted for blasting. And we, as a pirate in the third-person perspective, are still collecting thermal energy to subsist.

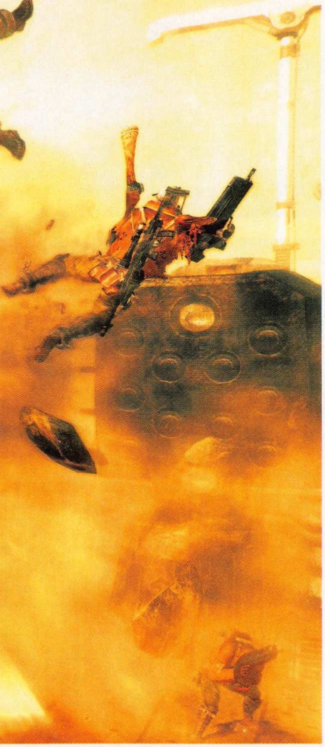
Electric company

The game begins in *Planet's* familiar arctic void, but quickly shifts gears after its introductory elements have been dispatched. The action picks up once we reach E.D.N. III's mysterious jungles, but not before the developers toss in a delightful bit of cutscene dialogue in which one burly male snow pirate suggests another burly male snow pirate might enjoy—no lie—a nice foot rub. This alone may make *Lost Planet 2* worth its price tag.

Campaign mode provides for up to four-man combat squads, but the friendless can venture into enemy territory with as many as three AI-controlled cohorts. Collected thermal energy, spat out by dead enemies and artificial constructs alike, is crucial for survival on E.D.N. III. This energy is shared among the team; computer-controlled allies will alternately augment and drain the pool depending on their actions. If

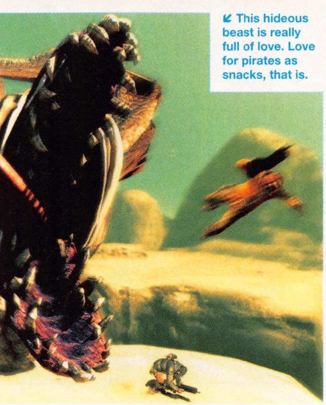
the energy is wholly depleted, the game comes to an ignominious end.

Together with the introduction of a quick-healing device (activated by holding the DualShock's Start button) called the Harmonizer, thermal energy management serves to elevate *Planet 2* over its more brainless ilk. We had to constantly monitor the thermal energy meter, and firefights were sometimes a costly proposition. None of this is rocket science,



➘ Build your pirate

Lost Planet 2 offers considerable decorative- and combat-specific customization options for would-be pirates looking to make the leap into multiplayer. Earning credits in the game's campaign mode allows for the purchase of weapons, gestures, special abilities, and taunts, which can then be transferred to your online warrior.



➘ This hideous beast is really full of love. Love for pirates as snacks, that is.

and no one will ever proclaim the game a thinking-man's shooter, but the energy mechanic does add an intriguing (and ever-looming) sense of urgency to the proceedings.

Bug out

Initial missions seem rather straightforward: see it, kill it, move on. A frightfully snow-choked first stage reintroduced us to the VS—a mechanical and hulking two-legged "vital suit" that can be driven like a tank. These behemoths provide additional firepower and protective armor, and it's possible for an allied solider to clamber up and ride on its legs. We also revisited the grappling hook, which allowed us to zip upward (or rappel downward) to reach otherwise inaccessible game areas.

A mini-boss fight caps off the introductory sequence, and it's here *Lost Planet 2* shows its mettle. A huge bug-like Akrid emerges from the snow, its colossal foreclaws poised to rip and tear at its foes. We're tasked with shooting its weak spots, said spots conveniently lit up in the manner of the Wu-Tang Clan, pre-concert. Here, it's at least a close approximation of good fun to rip a minigun from its base and lay down a fire sufficient to dismember the enemy before finally blasting its glowing thorax to hell.

Post-tundra levels had us plowing through the jungle, tearing up bulbous, plant-like monstrosities, lesser Akrid, and human enemies alike, with the ultimate goal being to bust up someone's drilling operation. The jungle here is suitably foreboding with its fallen trees and hanging vines, and it provides a nice backdrop for the slaughter that ensues.

An online mode offers 16-player combat over the PlayStation Network and standard fare is presented for everyone's bloodlust: elimination, team elimination, and post grab. This, however, remains a tale for another day. | Greg Orlando

➚ As a space pirate, we had ample opportunity to discover exotic alien life, then kill it.

→ Imagine a half-buried palatial city of the future in the middle of a desert. Sounds pretty awesome to us.

SPEC OPS: THE LINE

Drawing a line in the sand

PS3 AVAILABLE: Late 2010
GENRE: Military shooter PUBLISHER: 2K Games
DEVELOPER: Yager

↘ With both opulent interiors and wide-open deserts (with the occasional sand storm), *Spec Ops* promises a wide variety of gameplay.

The most provocative shooter ever. That's the goal anyway, according to the developers at Yager. With their latest title, *Spec Ops: The Line,* they hope to confront players with the sort of gut-wrenching moral choices that real soldiers struggle with every day, forcing them to choose between what they know is right and what they must do to accomplish their given objectives.

At one point during our demo, for example, we discovered a room full of civilians being rounded up at gunpoint. Do we immediately spring to the rescue, gun blazing? Do we ignore the situation entirely so as to not betray our position—while leaving the civilians to their fate? Or do we blow out the window behind the crowd, burying soldiers and innocents alike in an avalanche of sand? Our actions at this moment not only require a snap moral decision, but could tangibly impact the rest of the game by, say, resulting in the death of characters that we might have interacted with later in the game.

Rather than setting this modern military allegory in some contemporary war-torn state, however, Yager has selected a slightly more fantastic locale: a near-future Dubai that's been swallowed whole by catastrophic sandstorms. Enter Special Forces Captain Martin Walker who, with two squadmates, attempts to rescue an Army colonel who'd been training soldiers in Dubai when the sandstorms hit. He was presumed dead until a mysterious distress signal surfaced several years after the storms subsided.

As you might expect, the situation isn't nearly as straightforward as it first seems (the colonel you're rescuing may or may not be totally insane). The gameplay, however, should feel mostly familiar. At its core, *Spec Ops* is a squad-based, third-person military shooter utilizing a sticky cover system—complete with realistic destructible environments and some near-future weaponry. There are no skill trees or upgrades to slow you down, but you will have full tactical control over your teammates.

And before you ask, no, the campaign is not co-op, but the developers assured us that a separate online co-op mode will accompany the game's extensive multiplayer offering. Better break out the bulletproof sunscreen. | Scott Butterworth

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SUPER STREET FIGHTER IV

New faces to the fight

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** April **GENRE:** Fighting **PUBLISHER:** Capcom **DEVELOPER:** Capcom

↗ Looks like T. Hawk's been working out since *SSFII,* but DeeJay's not impressed.

PLAYER 1
K.O.
89
2 WINS
CPU
T.Hawk
DeeJay

We're addicted again. All it took was a few minutes (which turned into a few hours, then a few days) with a preview build of *Super Street Fighter IV,* and we're utterly hooked.

As you might expect, the basic gameplay is largely unchanged. You've still got focus attacks, the Revenge and Super meters—which gradually fill during a fight and can be cashed in to unleash devastating special attacks—and all the tricky combos that fuel the franchise. It's fast-paced and undoubtedly deep but can still deliver a quick dose of flashy arcade fun.

Street Fighter IV vets will notice a few subtle gameplay tweaks, but the most obvious (and awesome) change is the addition of one new Ultra attack for every character. Don't like Ryu's massive fireball Ultra? Go ahead and select his supercharged flying uppercut instead. Having a choice definitely gives us more freedom to develop our own style, which in turn deepens the experience for everyone. Because who knows what kind of crazy stuff our opponent's going to pull?

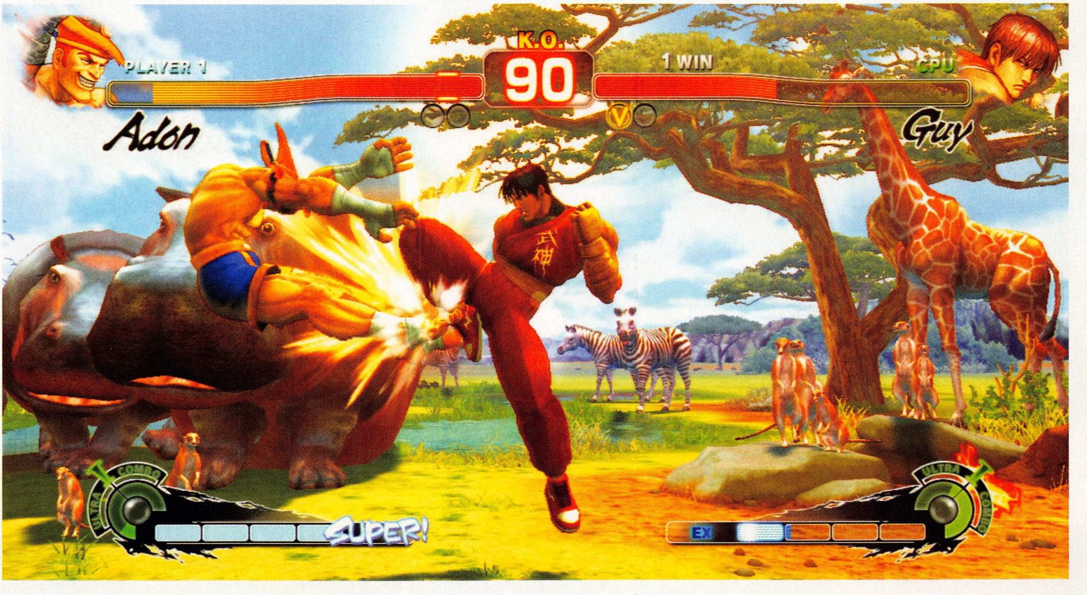
And it might be all in our heads, but the difficulty of the AI feels slightly scaled back. We ripped through the game on Medium with absolutely no trouble, so it's either that or we're a lot better at *Street Fighter* than we remember. Doesn't really matter, though, since *SSFIV* also boasts a host of new online multiplayer options, including a Team Battle mode and a winner-stays-on tournament mode called Endless Battle—both of which are excellent for competing against friends.

But the main attraction here is the collection of 10 additional characters. Unfortunately, we're only allowed to comment on the first six. DeeJay and T. Hawk retain their basic move sets from the days of *Super Street Fighter II,* so fans of the classic will have no problem slipping back into shape. Adon, Cody, and Guy—who didn't really turn up until the *Alpha* games and therefore won't feel as familiar to some—are all unique and useful in their own ways. And Juri—the only brand new character so far—plays a little like Fei Long: fast and full of kicks. We can't wait to see how all these characters are put to use online. | Scott Butterworth

PLAYER 1
K.O.
62
Cody
SUPER!

PLAYER 1
K.O.
81
1 WIN
CPU
Adon
Guy
SUPER!

↓ Five new stages provide fresh distractions while you're fighting. Look, hippos!



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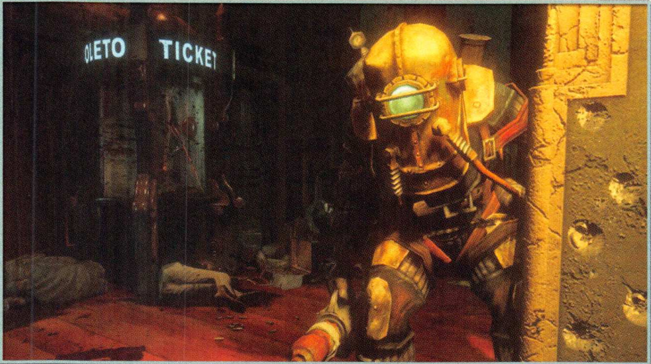
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BLUR

Speed is not enough

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Spring **GENRE:** Driving **PUBLISHER:** Activision **DEVELOPER:** Bizarre Creations

We need more eyes...or a brain upgrade. Because somewhere between navigating a track, determining the optimum racing line, and jockeying for position against competitors—while acquiring power-ups and formulating and executing attack and defensive strategies—we realized we didn't have the mental bandwidth to process it all. Yes, it's all a *Blur.*

Whether it's top speeds, lap times, or car counts, most driving games have a fixation with numbers. But the digits that figure most prominently in Activision's new arcade-style racer are those of first and last place—and you'll marvel at the dizzying speed at which you cycle up or down the positions in between during a race.

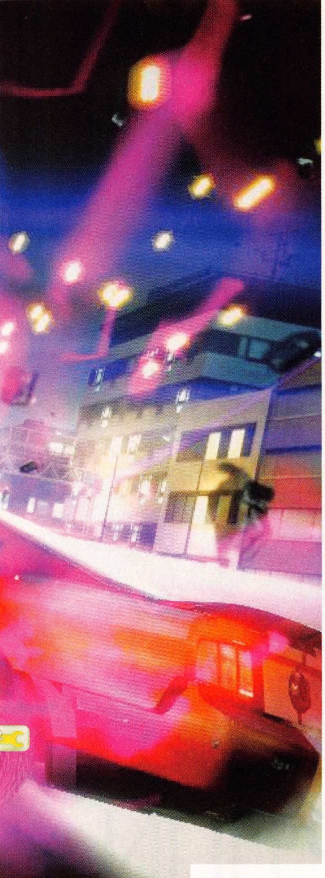
Performance mods

Developer Bizarre Creations aims to create an intuitive, inclusive racing experience in which anyone can be competitive—even a novice amongst a field of veterans. Our early test drive of the game's multiplayer modes reveals they're on track with an appealing, and potentially addictive, racing game that comes across as a next-gen *San Francisco RUSH* supercharged with kart racer-style combat.

At current count, there over 50 licensed vehicles racing on 30 tracks in 14 real-world locations including Los Angeles, San Francisco, Barcelona, Tokyo, and the dev team's home turf, the London suburb of Hackney. Among the cars we spotted on *Blur's* streets were the Audi TTS, BMW E92 M3, Ford GT500, Lotus Exige, Corvette ZR-1, Ford Focus RS, Land Rover Defender, and a '60s era Chevy Camaro. While 50-plus cars might not seem like much of a stable compared to some games, there seems to be an appealing mix of marques and vehicle-types ranging from classic to contemporary models.

But as much fun as it is to smash and crash real-world vehicles on real-world streets, the power-ups are the true stars of *Blur.* At the start of the game, each vehicle sports three power-up slots with more slots becoming available as you rank up. Your success depends on your ability to juggle driving duties while simultaneously evaluating the race field to determine which power-up

↘ Unlock or purchase special versions of rides that reflect various car cultures like Drift, Smooth, and Tuner.



↖ Panels crumple on cars as they flip and roll down the track.

↘ Blink of an Icon

Blur's power-ups hold the key to car performance, race position, and your ultimate victory. Commit these icons to memory so you'll be prepared to make race-determining decisions without having to hit the brain brake.

SHOCK Fires three EMP fields in front of the race leader, but can be evaded if you've got the car-handling skills.

MINE Throw it ahead or drop it behind you to spin vehicles out—a great present to leave around any blind corner.

BARGE Traffic got you down? Blast nearby cars away from you with this close-range attack.

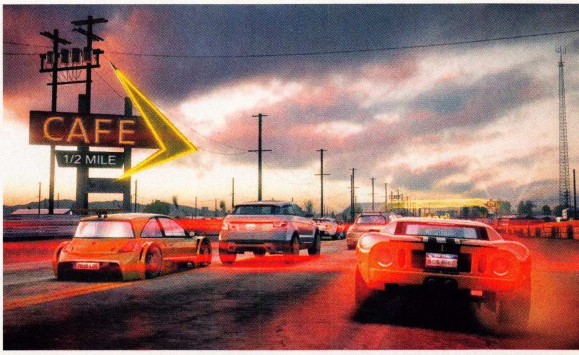
BOLT If your timing and aim are good, fire these three energy rounds to nudge competitors off course.

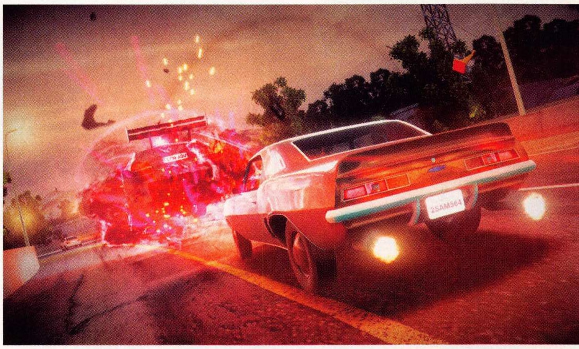
SHUNT Shoot it and forget it with this car-flipping homing missile—a favorite when chasing down opponents.

NITRO Blast ahead of the pack with this burst of speed or fire backwards to use as an airbrake.

SHIELD A calming oasis amidst the vehicular mayhem that protects you from power-up attacks and collision damage.

REPAIR Slam, bam, thank you, ma'am: A quick-fix for battle and impact damage to keep you in the race.





↖ A better driver in front of you? No problem—if you're stocked with power-ups.

item to cycle to and utilize for best advantage. But beware, a pack-leading performance can be undermined by one missed icon pick-up.

Cursing in traffic

Blur's multiplayer can be played online with up to 20 players, or locally with four-player splitscreen action. To its credit and our benefit, Bizarre mirrored many of the online play features found in Activision sibling *Modern Warfare.* A progressive ranking system rewards players with "fans" for practically any in-game action: The more fans you earn, the higher your ranking, which allows you to purchase power-up modifications that provide a competitive edge—or at least more strategic options—for future races. Enter the Mod Shop to use the *MW*-style loadout system to save up to four custom setups that match your preferred driving style or optimize different race strategies. Like to get down and dirty? Set up your car to deliver more punishing impacts. Prefer to focus on pure racing? Tune your ride for enhanced speed and maneuverability. The choice is yours, with the option to switch among loadouts before every race.

Even though *Blur's* not quite street ready, we can already tell it's a fun ride. The only real question is whether its unassuming pick-up-and-play focus will have staying power with hardcore racing gamers. We can imagine *Gran Turismo* fans decrying the absence of real simulation elements and *Split/Second* fans railing on about an emphasis on luck over true skill, but *Blur* isn't really about the cars or the driving—it's about sticking it to the other guy in every way imaginable. There's always room in our garage for that kind of action. | Roger Burchill

↘ *Blur* plays like a classic kart racer, but its looks are pure next-gen driving game.

RED DEAD REDEMPTION

Climbing onto the saddle

PS3 AVAILABLE: April GENRE: Adventure PUBLISHER: Rockstar DEVELOPER: Rockstar San Diego

Framing hero John Marston's impressively textured face against the twinkling night sky with the Right-analog stick. Pressing Square to rear up our horse and cooing as an eagle randomly swoops by. Like a sepia-toned trip down memory lane, *Red Dead Redemption* has managed in a brief 90-minute playtest to capture our hearts with fond recollections of poetic moments. In fact, these quiet respites from the action stand out more than the functional but fairly procedural mission shootouts (like blasting through wave after wave of goons, skipping between cover, and, yes, shooting explosive barrels to reclaim a Gatling gun).

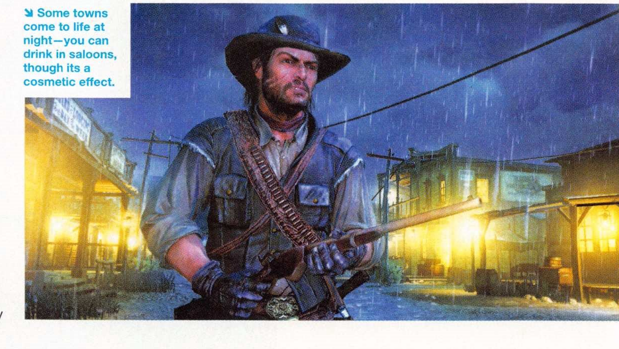
The closer we get to Rockstar's third-person, free-roaming cowboy adventure—think *GTA: Wild West,* set at the turn of the century, as the lawless Old West collides with the politics and technology of the new world—the more impressed we are with its intoxicating atmosphere. Now, Rockstar just needs to make sure the largely functional reality will match its wicked potential.

Fistful of buttons

The core mechanics are like any solid cover-to-cover shooter, less polished than genre-pinnacle *Uncharted 2,* but more functional than *GTA IV.* R1 snaps Marston to cover, allowing free-aim or blind fire. Hold L1 to bring up a weapon wheel menu, or D-pad left or right to quick switch between weapons including pistols, bottle grenades, rifles, and shotguns. Collision detection is satisfying, but enemy hit animations are not quite as precise as you might wish. We occasionally found it hard to sprint between cover (hold and tap X, like *GTA,* to run), as we were locked in the crouch animation (tap L3). It's far from a problem, just not overly intuitive.

Horse riding is superb. Tap D-pad up to whistle for you horse (like hailing a taxi in *GTA IV),* and tap X to giddy-up—kick too much and your horse will buck, sending you flying. Handily, you can "coast" behind other character's horses—ride up from the rear and hold down X (your health bar changes color to indicate you're in cruise control)—allowing you to aim without worrying about riding, making it easier

↘ Some towns come to life at night—you can drink in saloons, though its a cosmetic effect.

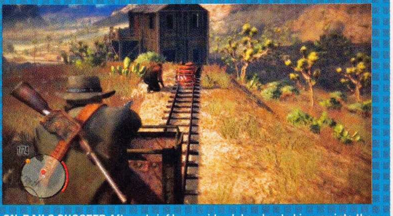


↖ The cover mechanics are solid, but shootouts aren't as intense or responsive as in *Uncharted 2*.

↘ How a mission plays out

Collude with a wandering drunk to rescue a Gatling gun

BOOZE COMPANY In one mission, John forms an uneasy alliance with a drunk Irish vagrant (whose life he saved earlier in the game) who knows the location of a Gatling gun needed to attack Fort Mercer.



ON-RAILS SHOOTER After a brief horse ride, John shoots his way into the mine, using cover and shooting barrels, before pushing the gun to safety on a mine cart—but the mission wasn't as intense as we'd hoped.

to focus on mid-ride chatter and mission info. You can lasso and ride any horse, plus—if you're barbarous—skin *any* animal (tap Triangle over the corpse), then sell its hide for cash.

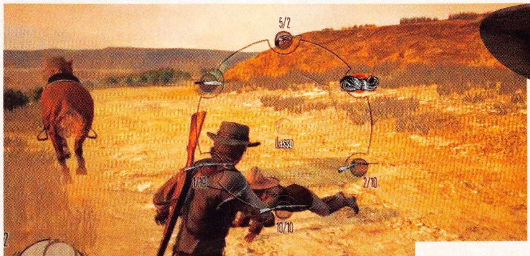
The good or the bad

The "Honor" morality system accrues in analog fashion, with plus/minus scores for good/bad deeds (like capturing, or killing wanted men), but you're only digitally good or bad. Your status has no effect on the story progress, but does affect how the world reacts to you—townsfolk may offer help, pay respects, or shun and insult you accordingly. Your Fame level grows as you complete more main and side missions, but is only equivalent to an "experience" or game progress rank. Money can be gained virtuously, or viciously, like *GTA*. It's quite possible, though despicable, to walk into a bar, lasso a prostitute, drag her into the street, shoot her, and steal her money.

It's this rich potential, oddly, that may prove frustrating. The much-touted random events—like being attacked by a snow leopard, or approached by a screaming stranger, invariably lead to kill/don't kill choices. Horsemen and delivery wagons will randomly rattle by as you roam the plains, but again, there's no conversation options or unique interactions—a bit like pedestrian encounters in *GTA*. Missions can result in more open outcomes. In one instance, we stormed a building to protect a farmer and his daughter—depending on your specific actions, neither, both, or only one of them can die, subtly affecting the event's resolution.

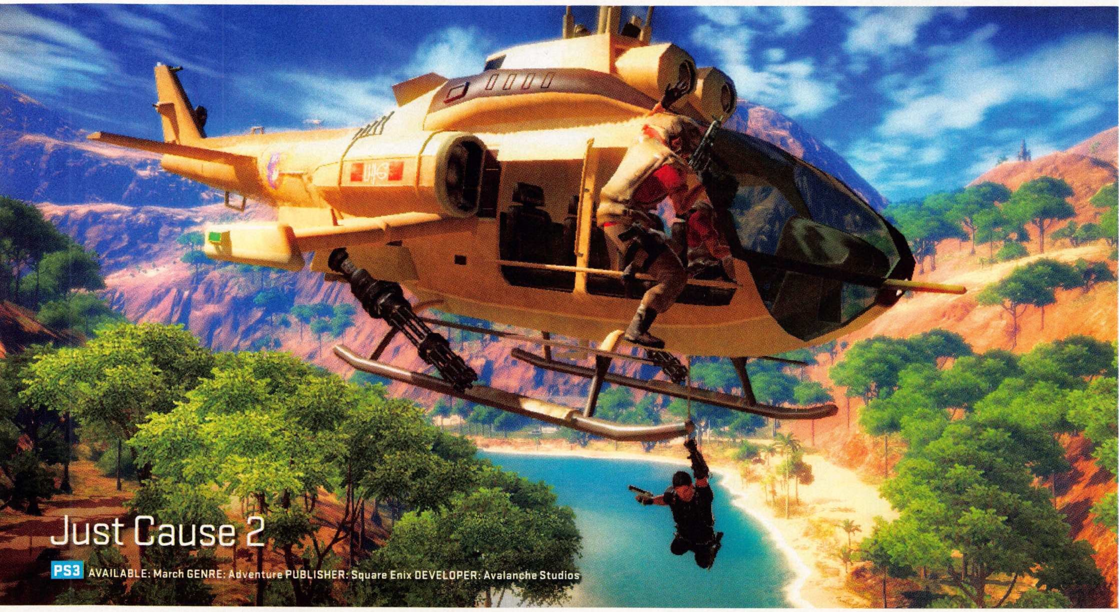
The illusion of choice, and solid if so-so mechanics, are potentially minor gripes given the sheer intoxicating sweep, and beauty, of the world—from go-anywhere snow-draped canyons, to aching sunsets on open rivers and bustling twilight towns. While engaging in linear, if explosive, missions doesn't deliver the instant highs of, say, *Uncharted 2's* key scenes (in terms of variety and intense "hot" moments), *Red Dead* feels more mono-paced. Putting the pad down does lead to delayed withdrawal pangs, as you pine for the haunting soundtrack, eerie beauty, and yawning scope that few games provide. If the story—reformed outlaw Marston's family is kidnapped by the government and he's forced to round up his old gang—can drive the duller missions and salve mild control quirks, and if the random events prove varied and fulfilling, this could yet prove an essential game. | Dan Dawkins

> **"** It's quite possible, though despicable, to walk into a bar, lasso a prostitute, drag her into the street, shoot her, and steal her money. **"**



↖ Lassoing thieves and using your horse to drag them never gets old.

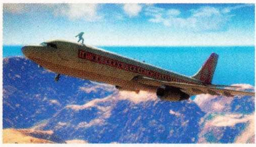
PlayStation Gallery

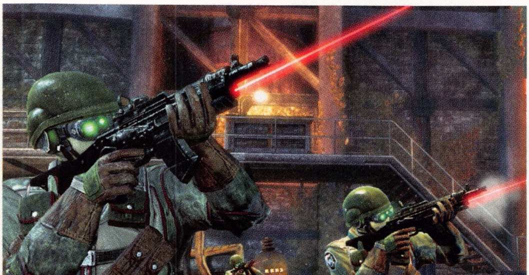


Just Cause 2

PS3 AVAILABLE: March GENRE: Adventure PUBLISHER: Square Enix DEVELOPER: Avalanche Studios

There's nothing—absolutely nothing—keeping you from your inalienable right to kick ass and take names in this open-world adventure. Complete your missions across the 400-square-mile island of Panau using big vehicles, big guns, and big stunts. For those frequent occurrences when you pull off an amazing one-in-a-million stunt, you can save your gameplay footage and upload it to YouTube, a feature exclusive to the PS3. | David Murphy

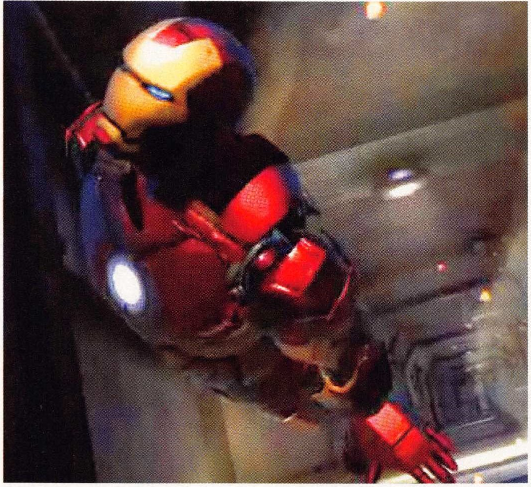




Singularity

PS3 AVAILABLE: Q2 GENRE: First-Person Shooter PUBLISHER: Activision DEVELOPER: Raven Software

Time is your weapon in *Singularity.* You've crash-landed on Katorga-12, an island with a time anamoly that keeps jumping you between the 1950s when the island was Russian-controlled and the dilapidated ruins it is in the present day. Use your time-manipulation device to decompose crates to find supplies, revert time to reconstruct walls for cover, or rot an enemy by instantly aging his flesh. Only time will tell, but *Singularity* looks to be a refreshing take on the well-worn shooter genre. | DM



Iron Man 2

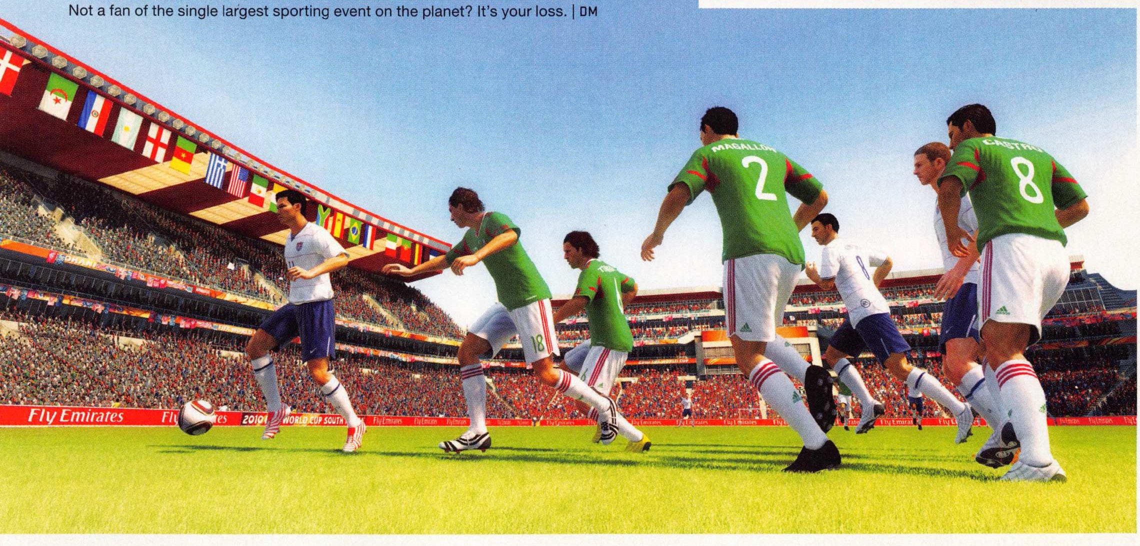
PS3 AVAILABLE: April GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: Sega DEVELOPER: Sega

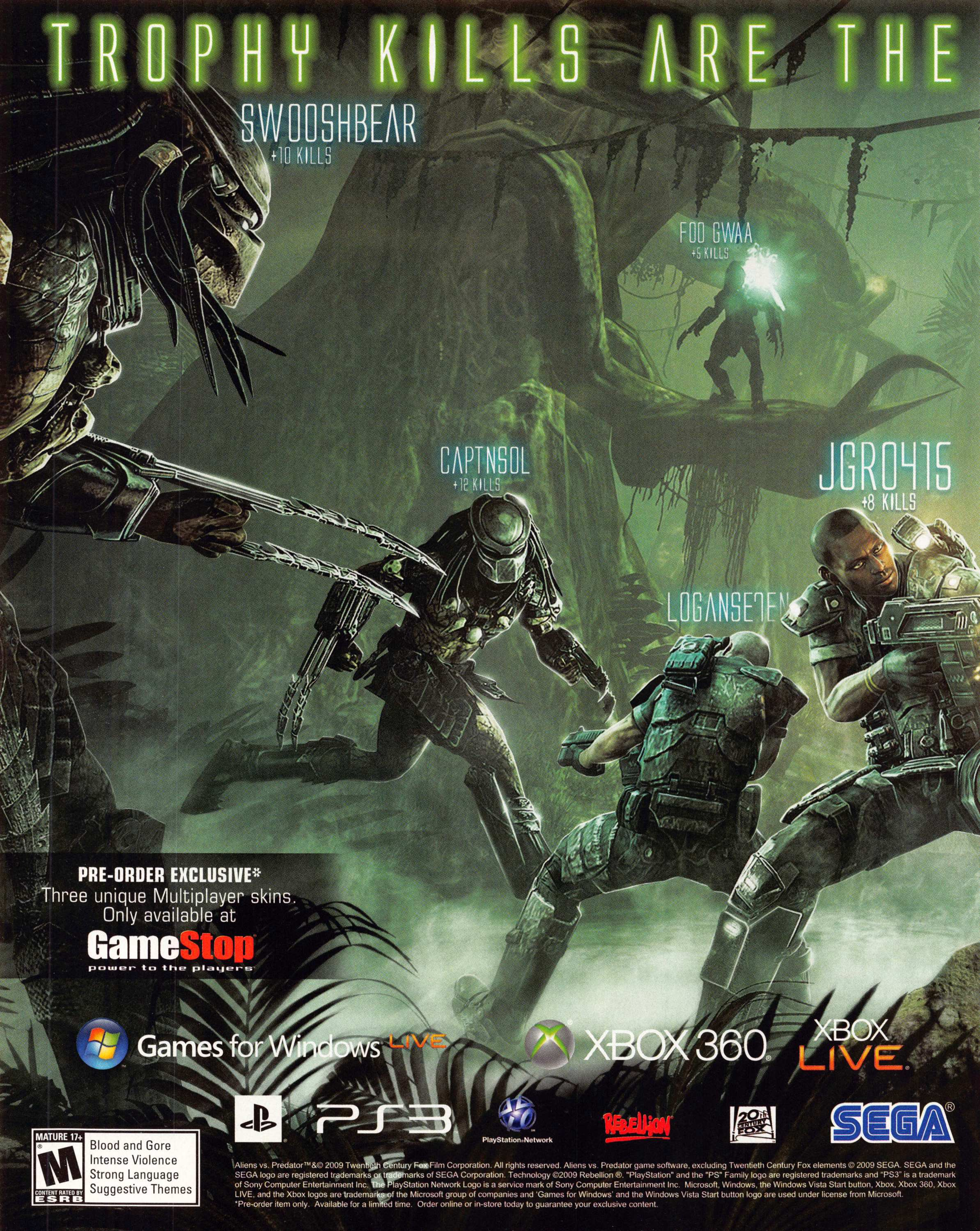
Assuming the role of billionaire inventor Tony Stark and hopping into Iron Man's red-and-gold armored suit always *seems* like fun, but frankly the last *Iron Man* game sucked eggs. But look at it this way: there's tons of room for improvement for Shell-head's second PlayStation adventure. Having comic book writer Matt Fraction pen the script is a step in the right direction. Expect to see appearances by many more of your favorite comic book characters including Whiplash and War Machine. | DM

2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa

PS3 AVAILABLE: April GENRE: Sports PUBLISHER: EA Sports DEVELOPER: EA Canada

The latest iteration in the *FIFA* series should be quite a treat for soccer fans as it's a virtual reproduction of the World Cup qualifiers and finals, along with a new Battle of the Nations online mode. As the real FIFA World Cup unfolds in June, EA Sports will prepare its free downloadable content: Story of the Qualifying and Story of the World Cup, where you can play through the defining moments leading up to and from this year's international tournament. Not a fan of the single largest sporting event on the planet? It's your loss. | DM

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- Blood and Gore
- Intense Violence
- Strong Language
- Suggestive Themes

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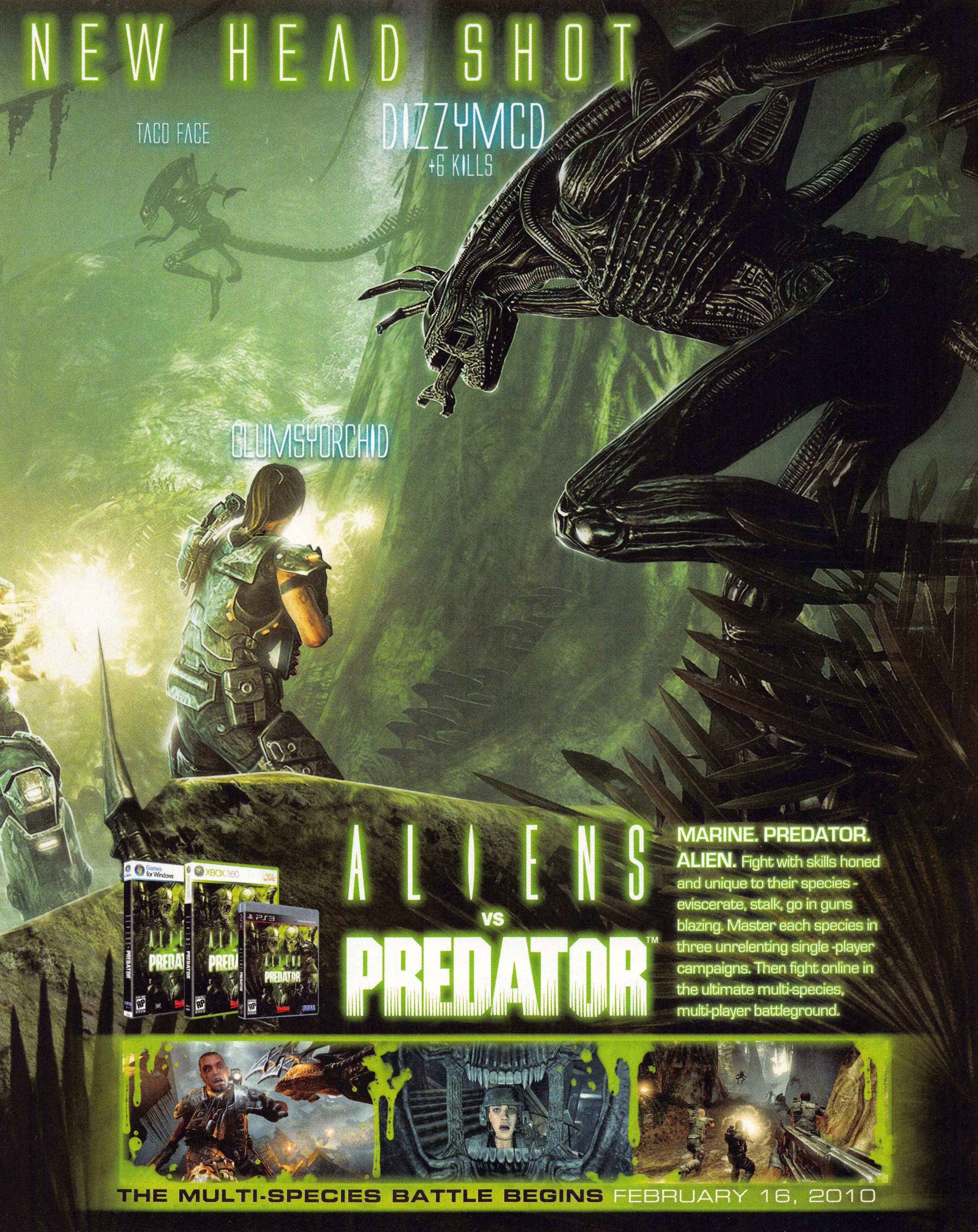
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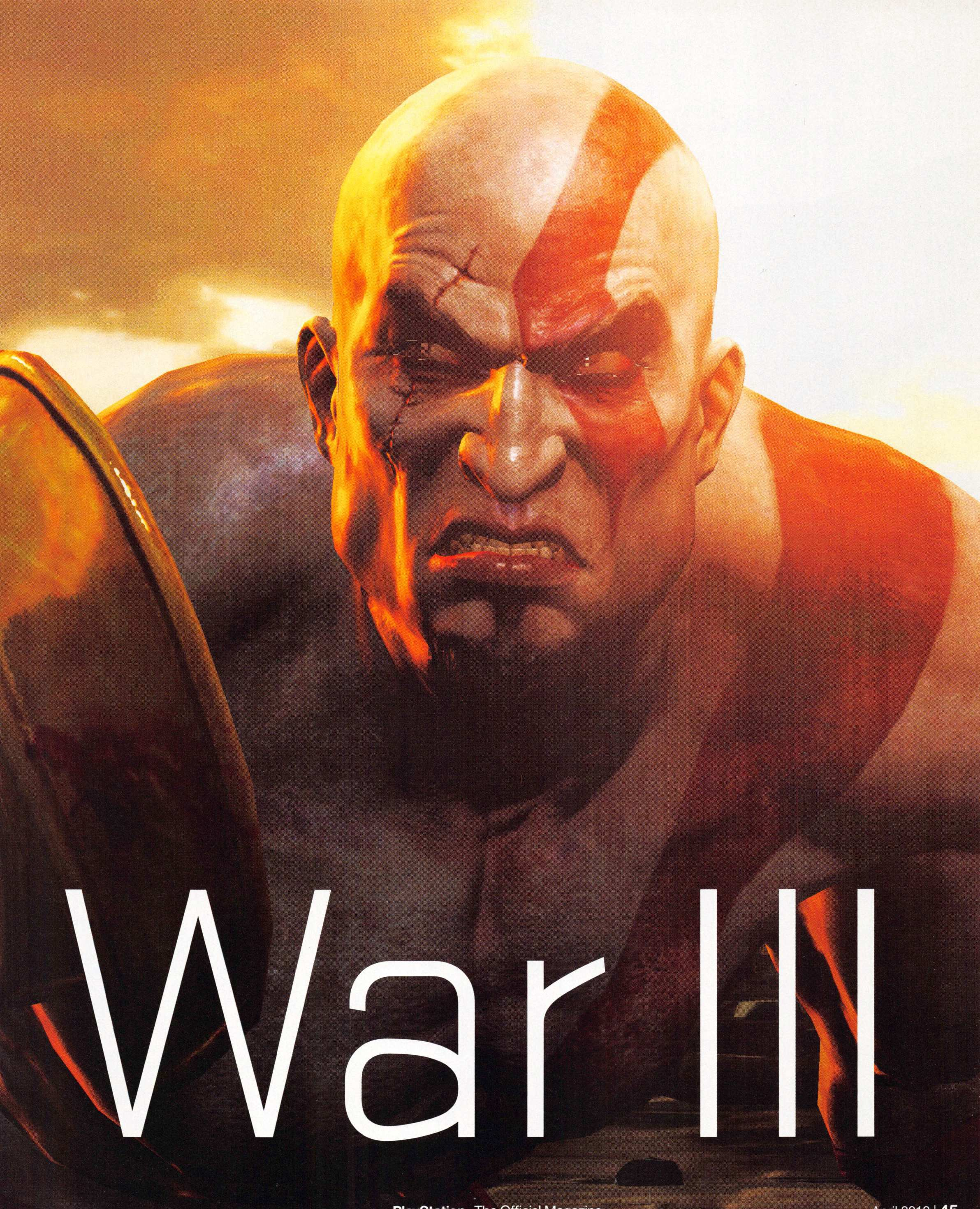
PlayStation The Official Magazine
★★★★★
Editors' Choice

WORLD-EXCLUSIVE FIRST REVIEW

Revenge is a dish best served by Kratos

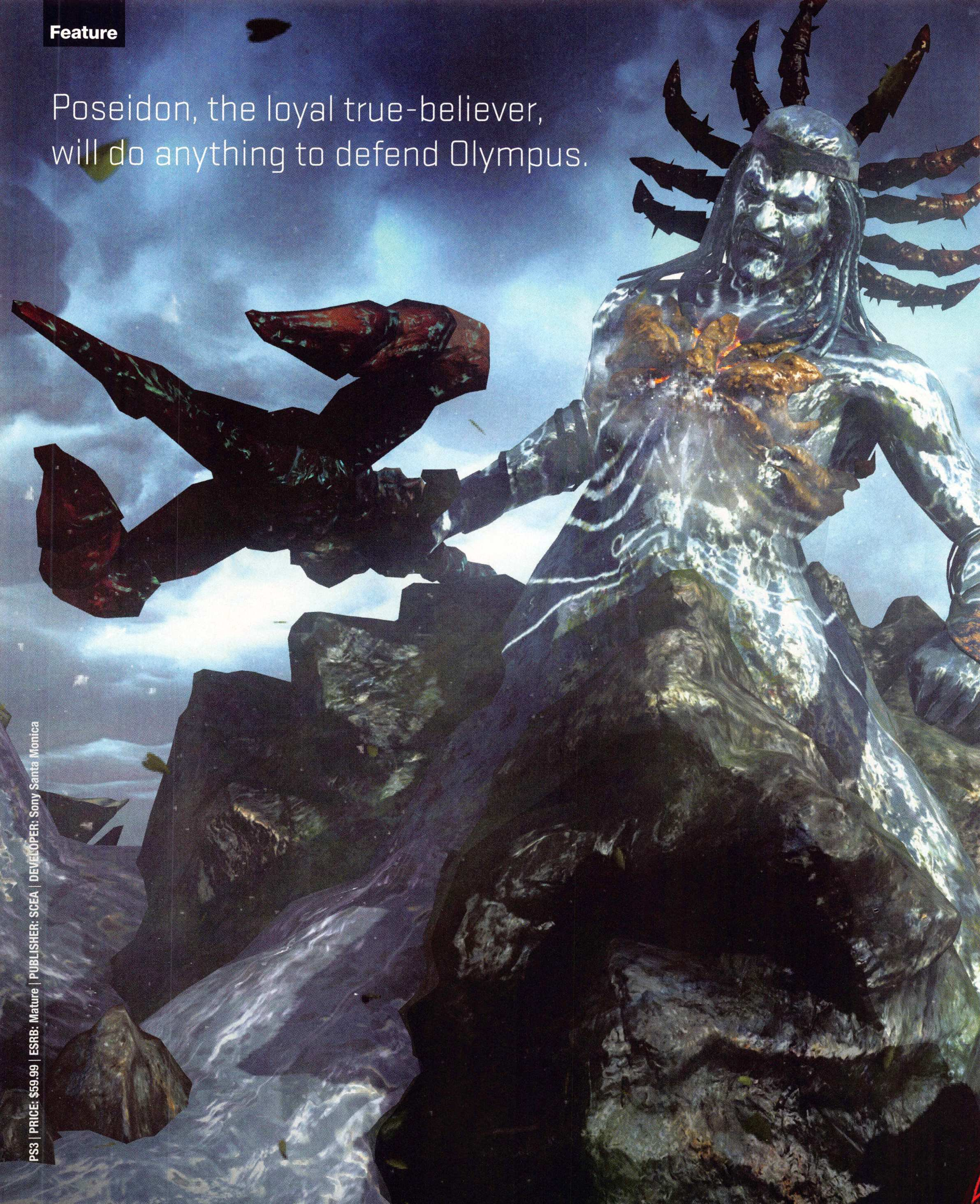
by Gary Steinman

God of



War III

Poseidon, the loyal true-believer, will do anything to defend Olympus.



PS3 | PRICE: $59.99 | ESRB: Mature | PUBLISHER: SCEA | DEVELOPER: Sony Santa Monica

Kratos is pissed. Once a hero, then a god, and now a mere mortal, the bald, belligerent battering ram is hellbent on revenge. And why shouldn't he be? After years of loyal service, his only reward was a curse from the Olympians: a merciless torment of nightmares over the loss of his family and the depravity of his own murderous actions. A pawn in the endless, petty battles between the gods themselves, Kratos has had enough. Driven to destroy them, he has found an unlikely ally in the Titans—and now he's on a warpath to kill them all, one by one, including his own father Zeus.

But that's old news to anyone who's played the PS2 Gods of War and the seminal PSP outing *God of War: Chains of Olympus*—all system-defining releases, universally acclaimed as some of the best PlayStation exclusives to grace their respective hardware. And even if you didn't play the previous games, it's all explained in the cinematic intro sequence.

So Kratos is pissed. We knew that already. All that really matters is, right now, as the game opens, we're ascending to the lofty heights of Olympus on the shoulder of the gargantuan Titan Gaia, eager to exact bloody revenge, ready to end the era of the gods once and for all.

THE END BEGINS

It's an opening sequence that's unsurprising yet awesomely epic. Unsurprising because we've come to expect as much from *God of War,* which has started each game with a battle so big that it threatens to burst through our screens and smash us flat against our living-room wall. Awesome because, well…it's even bigger than any of the previous games, which is saying a lot.

First, there's Gaia herself. As she climbs the cliff face, we cling to her body, a tiny speck against her rocky, earthen flesh, no bigger than one of her front teeth. Battles break out on her body—with Kratos plowing through all kinds of minor foes swarming through the forests populating her arms, shoulders, stomach, back. Meanwhile, the perspective shifts constantly. One moment, we're rushing forward on flat ground; the next we're upside-down, clinging to the underside of the Titan's limbs as she flails about. Gaia isn't just an epic backdrop for the action, but a massive, moving jungle gym whose body presents a unique arena for an even bigger battle to come.

Enter the Olympian gods who, from the heights of their mountaintop lair, are sent hurtling down like a legion of comic-book arch-villains to stop Kratos. Yes, they're musty mythological beings, but from the very start they're given a modern sensibility that lends an immediacy missing from most stories rooted in the classics. Hades is the ultimate thug who rules over his own domain; Hermes is a petulant provocateur who uses his speed to play the role of inescapable irritant; Helios is the high-school football star—a puffed-up jock whose smug celebration of his own glory dissipates in the light of reality.

But first there's Poseidon, the loyal true-believer who'll do anything to defend Olympus. When he sends out his steed—a crab-clawed, aqueous serpent with a horse's head—we know we're in for a dust-up of heroic proportions. And as the watery stallion rips through Gaia, we fight it from different angles, even going so far as to crawl inside Gaia's body to reveal the pulsing roots making up her beating heart. To call the multipart battle "intense" seems an injustice—a ridiculous understatement proven utterly inadequate as we close in on defeating Poseidon, eventually finishing off our first god with a brutal beating that (without spoiling why) brilliantly showcases Kratos' rage.

And then it happens. We are betrayed. Again. This time by Gaia. It seems Kratos not only has the gods to kill now, but the Titans too.

We're floating in the River Styx. Our powers are being eaten away (literally) by a sea of souls. When we finally arrive in Hades, we're helped by an unlikely ally, then handed the Blades of Exile (a variant on the standard whipsawing chainblades we've carried in all the previous games). And now we need to fight our way out of hell, rebuild our strength, find some new weapons, items, and magic, and climb back up to Olympus to destroy the gods.

If this sounds familiar, that's because it is. In now-typical *God of War* fashion, we begin the game fully powered up, then lose everything, only to find ourselves in the Greek hell. It's an elegant—if a bit cliché—way to remind us of how powerful we can be, before making us work to regain (and exceed) our initial powers en route to bloody revenge.

But that's not the only thing familiar about *God of War III's* gameplay. Within a few hours, we couldn't help but note every kill is just as satisfying as we remembered from the previous outings, and every brutal finisher remains as thrilling each and every time we pull one off. Eviscerating a centaur. Ripping a cyclops' sole eye from its socket. Stabbing a chimera through the skull with its own horn. Yep, it *never* gets old. Indeed, the final act in this trilogy is, to a great extent, similar to the previous games—but significantly tighter and delivered on a much grander scale.

Especially noteworthy, though, are all the minor improvements, beginning with the grabs. Instead of merely being able to wrap our arms around a skeleton and hug it to death, we can now hold onto a foe and use it as a weaponized shield, plowing through a crowd of enemies, knocking them down like oversized bowling pins, then finishing off by bashing a victim into a wall. Even toward the end of our 15-hour playthrough, this was still a total blast. Equally essential is a new set of distance grapples that, depending on the weapon equipped, either pulled us toward an enemy or vice-versa, allowing us to handle both airborne and teleporting enemies in new ways.

Another seemingly small upgrade that makes a *huge* difference: Items now have their own meter. That means, for example, the magical bow we acquired early on is now actually useful, because instead of pulling from a limited pool of magic (as it did in previous games), it now draws down the item meter, which quickly replenishes when left alone. In fact, all three of this game's items find their way into heavy rotation, becoming an essential part of our arsenal rather than an afterthought to be used only when necessary.

Ripping a cyclops' sole eye from its socket. Stabbing a chimera through the skull with its own horn. Yep, it *never* gets old.

PUNCH DRUNK

But the biggest upgrade is to the weapons themselves. We'll admit it: We love the Blades—especially the entrancing way they whirl around creating a mesmerizing fog of blood and dismemberment. And in *GoW III,* they remained, for a good portion of the game, our favorite tool of destruction. But as we worked our way into the second half of the game, we found ourselves using three of the four weapons in almost equal measure—a significant improvement from the overreliance on the Blades in the previous games.

Our favorite in the initial playtest had to be the Nemean Cestus, a thuddingly powerful, satisfyingly strong set of oversized fists perfect for crowd control or when facing off against slower mid-bosses. But when we found ourselves up against powerful magic-wielders, we whipped out the Claws of Hades, which literally rips souls from enemies' bodies and sets them against other foes. Then again, when facing a faster foe, the Blades always came out—not just for their speed and range, but because each weapon changes the way we move and, more importantly, dodge. (In case you couldn't figure it out, the Blades have the fastest dodge, the Cestus the slowest.) Each weapon also has a specific magic associated with it, giving us more reason to circle through our arsenal to unleash the full range of powers at our disposal.

Combat is everything in *God of War,* which is why it might seem puzzling to heap praise on *GoW III* for being wildly unbalanced. But consider this: Kratos is pure rage—unrestrained id set free to wreak havoc on the world. If that's not the definition of imbalance, then what is?

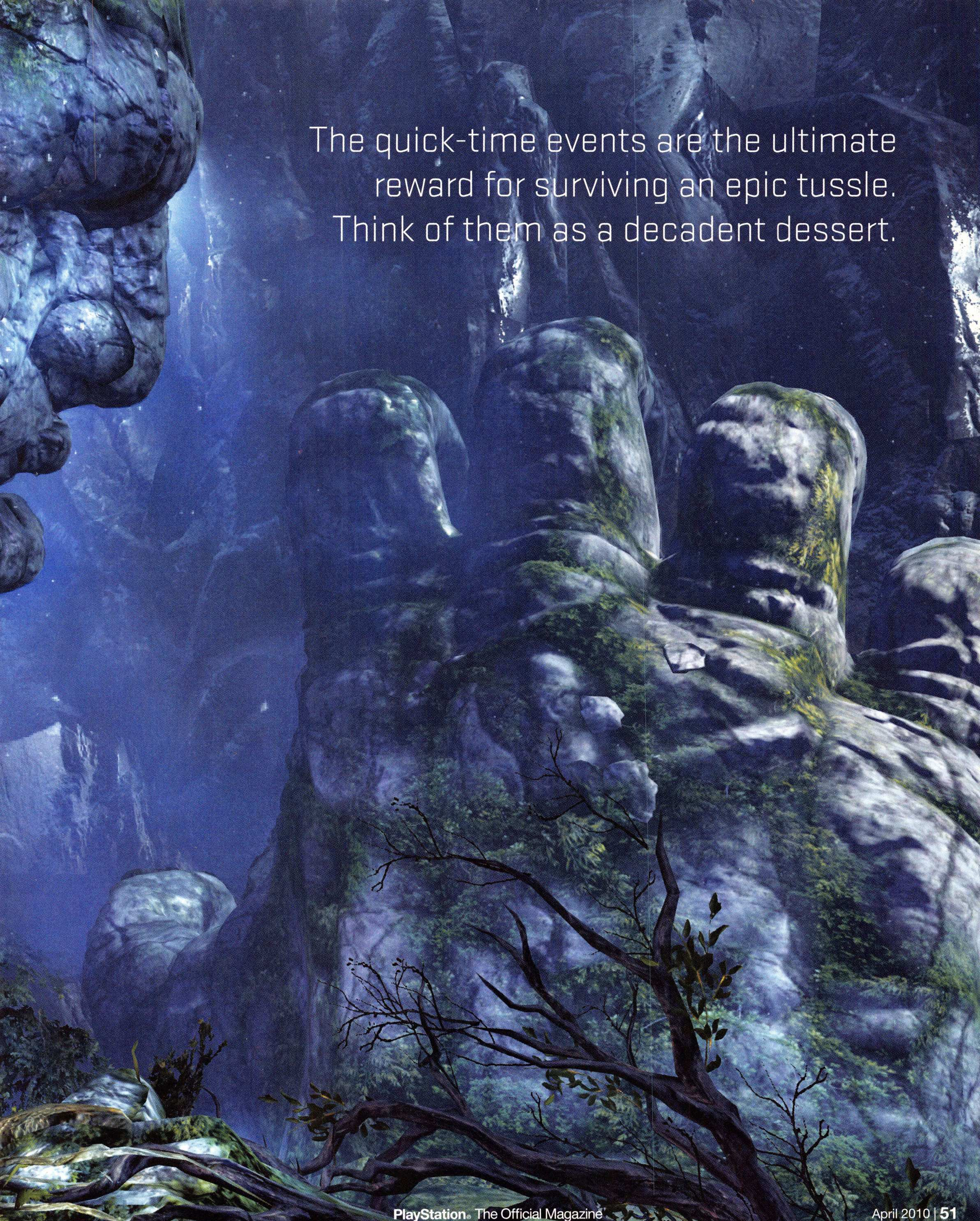
That's why we love that *GoW III* eschews a simple, upward-sloping difficulty curve. The game begins with an epic battle that, while tough, is supremely manageable. Then, things slow down a bit in hell, as we learn (and relearn) many of our skills, culminating in a massive, multipart showdown with Hades himself—a battle in which we died once but managed to beat on a second attempt.

Once back on Earth, the delightful sense of imbalance fully takes over. Some battles are a snap; others have us on the verge of tossing our controller. Even more surprising is where these challenges came from: Not every major boss battle proves all that tough (though every god we fought presents a uniquely clever challenge that's great fun to tackle). And not every crowd of scrubs and mini-bosses is all that easy. From manticores to minotaurs, enemies demonstrate a massive range of different attack patterns and moves—and *GoW III* does a brilliant job of mixing and matching these baddies in groupings to challenge us in surprising ways. In fact, one of our favorite battles is an arena-like confrontation toward the end of the game, in which wave after wave of respawning enemies pop up in different combinations. The only way to win: Using all our weapons and items, combos and special moves, magic and melee attacks, constantly switching tactics simply to survive. Brilliant stuff.

CHALLENGE OF THE GODS

It's a testament to the quality of the game that even the environmental battles are just as memorable as the awesomely huge boss fights—and that's thanks in part to the quick-time events capping off most encounters. Not all are mandatory. It's possible to dispatch a low- or mid-level foe while it's on the ropes, but doing so ensures missing out not only on a range of bonuses (more orbs to level up Kratos' skills or replenish his health/magic) but a delightful visceral reward as well. Like we suggested already, it's tough to top that powerful rush we got every time we gutted a centaur or smashed a brutish talos with its own massive hammer. Best yet, the standard QTEs have been refined in two significant ways. First, the prompts now flash in one of the four sides of the screen to better match the location of the button on the controller; this both makes it more intuitive and slightly more challenging, as our eyes have to scan the screen to quickly find the prompt when it appears. Next, on mid-level baddies, the QTE prompts aren't fully scripted, changing depending on our relative position—so there's no more memorizing rote patterns.

As for the major boss battles—the gods and the Titans (and a few other big surprises along the way)—the QTEs are the ultimate reward for surviving an epic tussle. Think of them as dessert: a decadent treat far sweeter than what we deserve, leaving us aglow while we savor the rich aftertaste of victory. Again, we don't want to spoil anything, but there are moments of such gleefully over-the-top violence committed against foes that are astoundingly bigger, stronger, and greater than us—and the best part is, the carefully designed QTEs made us feel like we're the ones who actually committed these larger-than-life acts.



The quick-time events are the ultimate reward for surviving an epic tussle. Think of them as a decadent dessert.

God of War III is beautiful. It's bloody. It's brilliant. But it's not perfect.

Oh, it comes close. The combat is immediately satisfying yet deceptively complex—straightforward enough for button-mashing fun, but challenging enough to prod us to explore its strategic depths in order to survive. By the end of the game, we still alternated between pounding away on just two buttons, and artfully dodging while using magic, combos, and items in carefully planned attack patterns.

It's also—almost needless to say—one of the best-looking games on the system so far, not just in terms of the character and world design, but also sheer graphical horsepower.

And the story is perfectly pitched, full of grand characters, righteous rage, surprising humor (just wait until Kratos visits Aphrodite's bedchamber), and most of all, empathy. Yes, despite Kratos' one-dimensional nature (his emotional range goes from angry to really, really, really angry), we can actually sympathize with his plight and see him as much more than just an enraged psychopath.

About the only stumbles, then, come in two areas. The first is minor: Exploring and escaping from Hades is a bit dull compared to the rest of the game; these levels are packed with puzzles more about *doing* than *solving*. In fact, until the final third of the game, almost all of the puzzles are physical challenges instead of cerebral ones. On the flip side, though, there are absolutely no "keys" to find, and little forced backtracking, so the game constantly pushes forward at a brisk, lively pace.

The other stumble is a doozy. The ending is a flabby mess. It's not that we fight the wrong foe, or that it happens in the wrong setting, or that there are no neat twists. It's the battle itself. By the time we battled our way to the finish line, we were ready: We knew how to use all our tools, and we'd been well-trained to use them all in a single encounter. But in our

Despite Kratos' one-dimensional nature (his emotional range goes from angry to really, really, really angry), we can actually sympathize with his plight.

showdown with Zeus (no, it's not a spoiler—who else could it be?), we stuck with one weapon and basically suffered through a vexing battle of attrition. And finally, after numerous attempts, the fight ended with the only (yes, *only*) QTE that felt like a QTE, pulling us out of the moment and failing to leave us feeling like a powerful hero pulling off something much bigger than us. Yech.

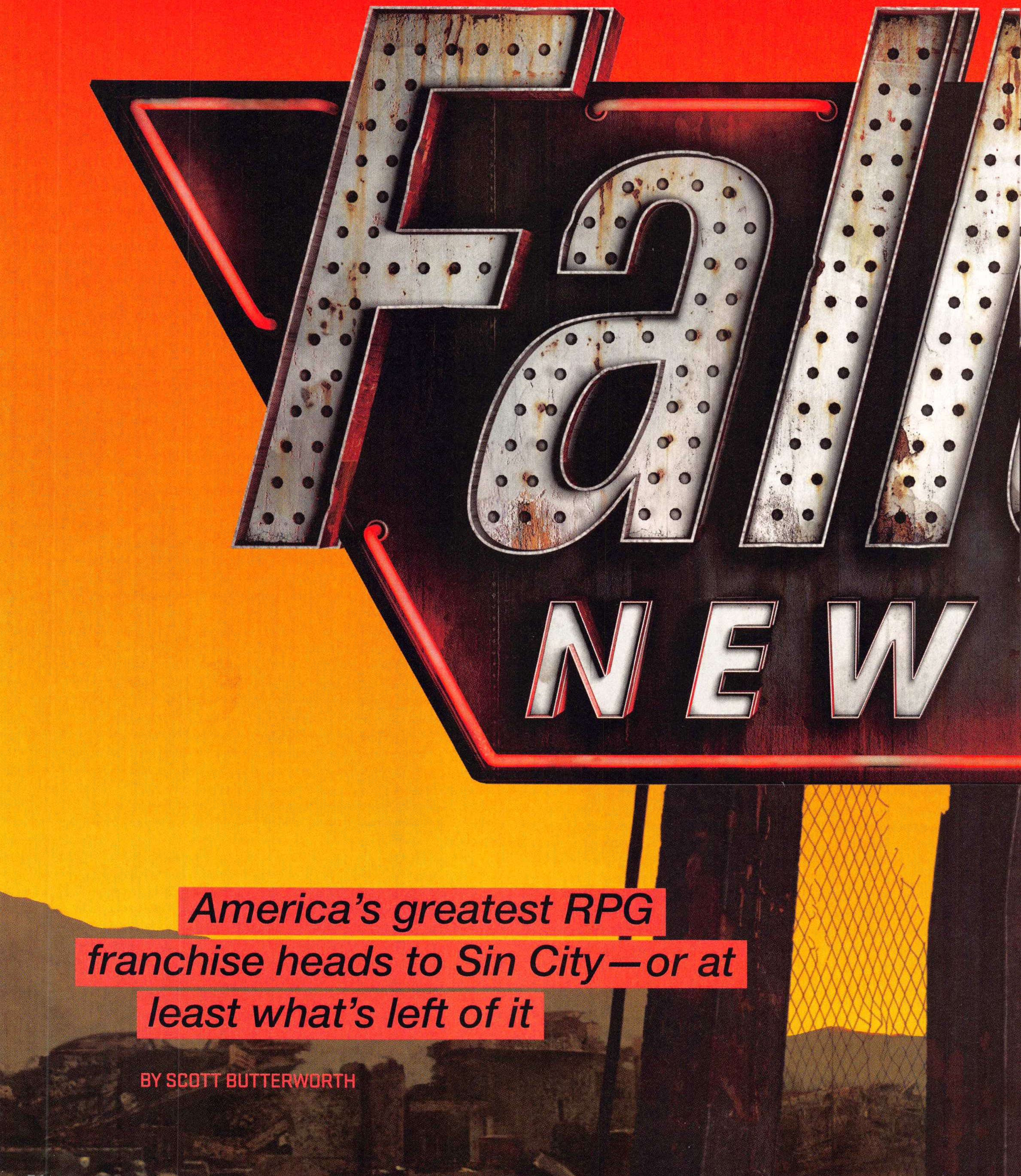
Meanwhile, the story itself ends in a way that's sure to be polarizing. We have no doubt some of you will love it, but for the record we didn't. It was overlong, overly sentimental, and a bit too preachy for our tastes. Redemption might come at a price—but that price shouldn't be so costly it robs the narrative of its raw, primal power.

LONG LIVE KRATOS

And yet, even a soggy ending can't dampen our enthusiasm for *God of War III.* Up until that final hour, the game delivers one of the most thrilling and epic experiences on the PlayStation 3. Indeed, our second Titan encounter, late in the game, is easily a contender for battle of the year—an insane organic setting where even the ancient god's fingernails become a highly contested battleground. (Alas, it was also the only other Titan-based battle aside from our opening melee alongside Gaia, but that second fight is so grand we'd gladly shell out a hefty helping of our next paycheck to purchase DLC delivering more of these extravagant encounters.)

So even though this marks the end of a trilogy—and more than likely the final outing for Kratos himself—our *God of War* journey is far from over. You'll find us playing this game again and again and again—each time mastering different moves and using different weapons in different situations—fighting our way through Hell and back, enjoying almost every moment of it. And even after we finally pry the game out of our PS3 and tuck it away on the shelf, *God of War III* will surely linger—an unforgettable conclusion to a legendary series. ■

Rating ★★★★★



America's greatest RPG franchise heads to Sin City—or at least what's left of it

BY SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

PS3 | AVAILABLE: Holiday | PUBLISHER: Bethesda Softworks | DEVELOPER: Obsidian Entertainment

Something has gone terribly wrong. It's hard to say exactly how it happened, but we're suddenly face down in a shallow grave in the middle of a nuclear wasteland that used to be a desert…with a hole in our head. Hell of a way to start a game.

Fallout
NEW VEGAS

"Some people will be like, 'This doesn't look post-apocalyptic enough.' But I'm hopeful that the content of the world will definitely feel post-apocalyptic." *–Josh Sawyer, Lead Producer*

LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

This is our favorite ceiling ever. We're laid up in the makeshift medical facilities of a man named Doc Mitchell, barely alive and completely disoriented. But seeing this ceiling means we escaped our gruesome fate…and we're left to figure out who shot us and why.

Much like Vault 101 in *Fallout 3,* Mitchell's home serves as the place where we fully customize our appearance and traits. This time, though, instead of zipping through our birth and adolescence, *New Vegas* cleverly frames the experience as a medical follow-up. Mitchell first asks us our name—giving us a chance to type one in—then hands us a mirror to inspect his surgical handiwork on our head wound, allowing us to adjust every aspect of our appearance, from gender to skin tone to age. Next, he tells us to measure our recovery using the Vigor Tester, which gives us a chance to set our character's basic attributes like strength and intelligence—just like the *You're S.P.E.C.I.A.L.* book in *Fallout 3.*

Finally, Mitchell gives us a psych evaluation—a stand-in for *Fallout 3's* G.O.A.T. test. This entertaining array of word-association games and inkblot tests essentially helps to define the skills that best suit you, from bartering to sneaking to blowing stuff up. Fans of the previous *Fallout* will notice a few minor changes though: the Big Guns and Small Guns skills, for instance, have been consolidated into the more inclusive Guns category, though an Energy Weapons skill has been added. We're also told that certain perks (upgrades earned though experience) have been "added and revised," but the team was light on specifics.

IF IT AIN'T BROKE

If any of this sounds familiar, that's intentional. Obsidian—which took over development duties from publisher Bethesda—knows a good thing when it sees one. They recognize that *Fallout 3* wasn't just one of 2008's most memorable titles (and PTOM's RPG of that year), but an absolute triumph for western role-playing games. Its retro-future, post-apocalyptic universe offered such an addictively rewarding mix of real-time action and character-centric exploration that it set a new standard for the genre. So rather than nuking the formula and attempting to build an entirely new game, Obsidian decided to give the people what they want: more *Fallout.*

"It's very important to us that it feel familiar," *New Vegas* project lead Josh Sawyer explains. "The thing is, people really liked *Fallout 3,* so why not just say, 'Okay, we'll take this and then just smooth it out, bump the gameplay experience up, make it feel fresh, and give players a totally new environment, new world, lots of exploring, lots of cool stuff to do.' That's really been our take on it."

In much the same way that *Vice City* and *San Andreas* built on the success of *Grand Theft Auto III* without drastically altering the underlying gameplay, *New Vegas* maintains *Fallout's* signature mix of blazing firearms and branching dialogue trees but travels west to Vegas. Comparable to its predecessor in both size and scope, *New Vegas* offers a tantalizing array of new adversaries, such as the particularly intelligent and insane breed of super mutants called Nightkin, and new areas, like a solar power plant that actually controls a devastating satellite laser—as well a whole new visual aesthetic.

"We put a lot of effort into making sure the Mojave Wasteland feels like *Fallout* but distinctly different from the Capital Wasteland," Sawyer tells us. "The Nevada area wasn't that heavily hit by nuclear weapons during the war; as a result, the skies are much clearer. In general, we wanted to give a warmer feel to this area even though it's still relatively desolate."

↗ Meet the New California Republic Rangers, an elite group of badass slave-hunting loners.

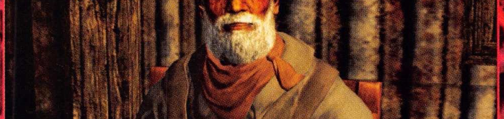
WELCOME TO THE WASTELAND

Though Bethesda is widely known as the studio behind *Fallout 3*, the series started life on the PC as a turn-based RPG created by Black Isle Studios (which later became Obsidian Entertainment) back in 1997.

In the universe established by that original game, technology began to progress at an extremely rapid pace after the conclusion of World War II, though American culture somehow never advanced past the norms of the 1950s. Then in 2077, a long-running war with China erupts into a global nuclear conflict that decimates the entire planet. Just over two centuries later, the events of *New Vegas* begin to unfold.

If you want to learn more about the series, you can download both of the original games from GOG.com for just $6 each. Trust us, it's a history lesson well worth the price of admission.

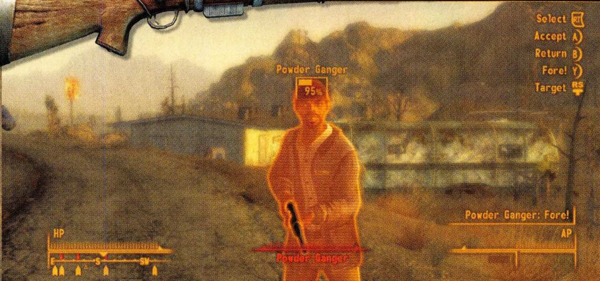
"We've done a lot of things to smooth out [the real-time combat] and make it more responsive, mostly in terms of the gunplay and how the guns feel."
–Josh Sawyer, Lead Producer

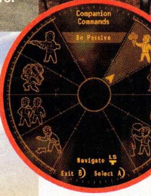


Howdy. What can Easy Pete do for you?

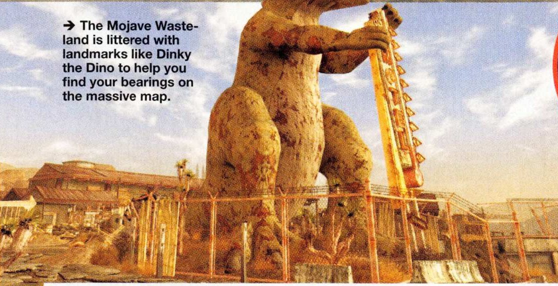
TALK THE TALK

Communicating with the locals hasn't changed much between *Fallout 3* and *New Vegas*—you still stare directly at the person to whom you're speaking, and you still respond by simply selecting your preferred line of text. However, your skills will now open up new dialogue options in certain situations. For example, Easy Pete here is initially reluctant to let you handle his dynamite. If you've chosen to upgrade your Explosives skill, however, you'll be able to convince him that you won't just blow yourself up. Very useful.





➔ The Companion Wheel doesn't grant substantial new command abilities, but does make it much easier to control your temporary AI partners.



➔ The Mojave Wasteland is littered with landmarks like Dinky the Dino to help you find your bearings on the massive map.

TARGET PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Having finished customizing our character at Doc Mitchell's, we're ready to step out into the Mojave Wasteland and begin our search for whoever put a gun to our head—but we're stopped short by an intriguing new option: Hardcore mode. Rather than being some extreme difficulty setting, this mode actually changes certain game parameters in order to "force a different type of tactical gameplay," Sawyer says. Mainly, we can no longer heal instantly using a stimpak (though we *can* heal slowly over time), we have to consider the weight of ammunition, and we can actually get dehydrated if we neglect to bring fresh water.

Outside of Doc Mitchell's, we can literally go anywhere and do anything we like. As in *Fallout 3,* the world and the story are completely open. We chose to stick to the main path, however, and met up with spunky local Sunny Smiles for a quick introduction to the newly tuned shooting mechanics. "We've done a lot of things to smooth out [the real-time combat] and make it more responsive, mostly in terms of the gunplay and how the guns feel. There's been a lot of tuning and balancing done with them—based on feedback that we've heard from people who've played *Fallout 3,"* Sawyer explains.

In addition to tweaking the feel of the game's shooter elements, Obsidian has added greater depth: Up to three weapons mods, like scopes and larger magazines, can be purchased and equipped on every gun. Weapons also have strength requirements, meaning weaker characters might have a tough time handling something like a minigun. There's now a greater number of unique weapons with specific uses, like the self-explanatory grenade machinegun. And for those who prefer close combat, characters with sufficient melee skills can execute new damage-boosting special attacks using the Vault-Tec Assisted Targeting System, which pauses combat to allow you to aim at specific body parts.

HEDGE YOUR BETS

After Sunny finished showing us the finer points of blowing the limbs off giant geckos, we journeyed into town and discovered perhaps the biggest new focus of *New Vegas:* factions. Essentially, the Mojave Wasteland is populated by a variety of groups—from clusters of small-town terrorists to wasteland-wide governments—and the way you choose to interact with each group will determine how they treat you. "The player has a lot of flexibility in how they want to deal with these groups," Sawyer emphasizes. "Faction gameplay is very important, and faction Reputation is important."

Speaking of Reputation, while it doesn't replace *Fallout 3's* Karma—which directly measured the morality of all of your actions—Reputation in *New Vegas* is forged only through those deeds that directly affect other people, creating a more sophisticated and nuanced gray area. A positive relationship with one group may foster bad blood with another, for instance. Karma will still impact certain aspects of the game, but it will mainly function as "a tally of the accumulated good and bad that you've done," according to Sawyer.

But don't worry—Reputation might add yet another layer of complexity to an already deep game, but Sawyer promises *New Vegas* will deliver on its simplest goal: "I want the game to be fun. That might sound ridiculous, but I think that sometimes RPG designers lose sight of that—like the fact that it's an RPG means that it can be crummy in some ways [laughs]. So it's very important to me that just playing the game on its own is a very enjoyable experience." ■

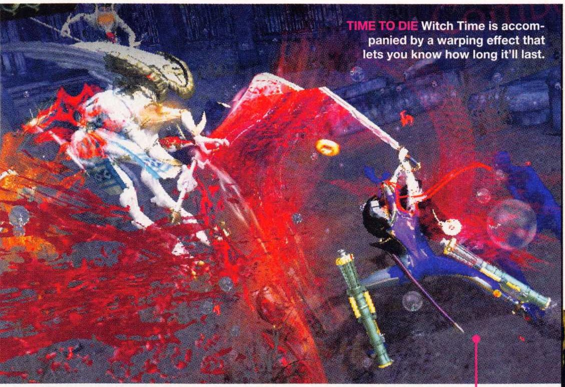
10 Magic Moments in Bayonetta

by Richard Stanton

1 BAYONETTA

Brutal, ballsy Bayonetta. Tongue like a whip, enough power to punch God into the sun, and a tush like two puppies in a sack. On her journey, she develops into the most fluid and ferocious fighting machine you'll ever control in gaming, capable of balletic artistry that shows how slow and weak everyone else is. A funny and mesmerising lead in a violent ballet.

CAT WOMAN Bayonetta moves like a panther (literally) with her transformation moves.



TIME TO DIE Witch Time is accompanied by a warping effect that lets you know how long it'll last.

2

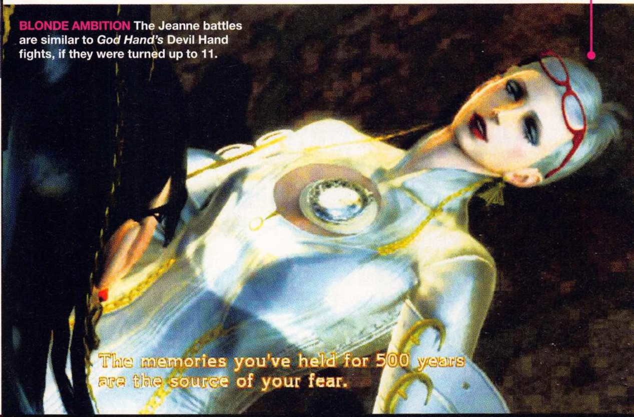
WITCH TIME

Where would a witch be without magic tricks? Eye-focusing light and chimes clue you in on the trajectory of every enemy's attack, and judging those correctly enables you to dodge at the last possible second and set up *Bayonetta's* party piece. The screen warps and time slows for a few critical moments, meaning every fight's full of bite-sized pauses as you judge a swing, flip over the blade at the last second, and stream back into their sluggish body with your incredible combos.

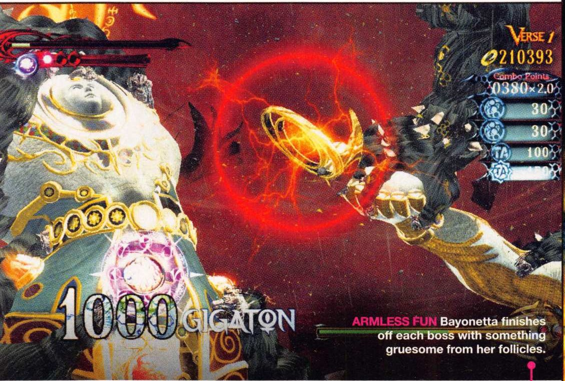
3

GENIUS JEANNE

The greatest opponent is always your double. In *Bayonetta* it's Jeanne, a Dante-colored deadly opposite number who you fight four times in a series of escalating brilliance. You have to be at your best, and being at your best is what *Bayonetta's* all about. The first battle is set 500 years ago and involves control of the Umbra throne, whereas in the present day you batter each other senseless on top of airships, rockets, collapsing buildings, and while sprinting up walls. Every time Jeanne takes a beating it proves how amazing you are—what a friend.


The memories you've held for 500 years
are the source of your fear.

BLONDE AMBITION The Jeanne battles are similar to *God Hand's* Devil Hand fights, if they were turned up to 11.



ARMLESS FUN Bayonetta finishes off each boss with something gruesome from her follicles.

4

RIPPING OFF A BOSS' ARMS

The thing about bosses is that you rarely get to actually rip them to shreds. *Bayonetta* lets you literally tear them apart, piece by piece, throughout and after the battle. Our fave sees you tearing all the limbs off a floating behemoth, before summoning huge hands out of your hair that play volleyball with the boss' body before crushing it to a pulp. Even mid-level boss fights are epic, with one letting you pile-drive a giant snake before turning your hair into a bird to *eat it to death.*

5

NA NA NA NA BATWOMAN!

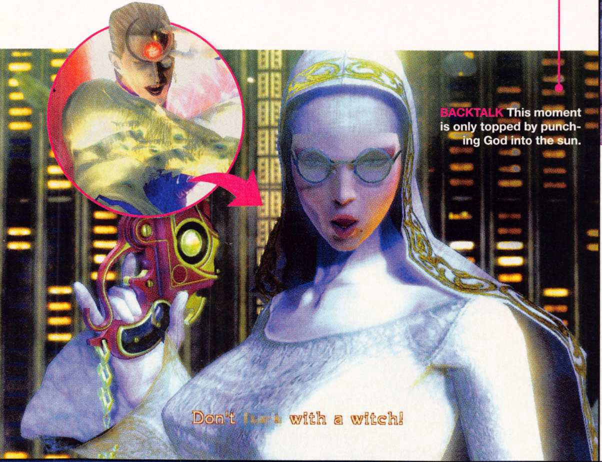
The best way to avoid getting hit is to use your witchy powers to transform into a flock of bats. A move you get half way through, it takes care of moments when your timing's ever-so-slightly off. Hit dodge as a blow lands and Bayonetta turns into loads of skittering rodents, reforming seconds later and activating Witch Time. A brilliantly cool life saver. Where's yours, Kratos?

ANIMAL MAGNETISM Bayonetta can also turn into a panther or a crow. Choices, choices...

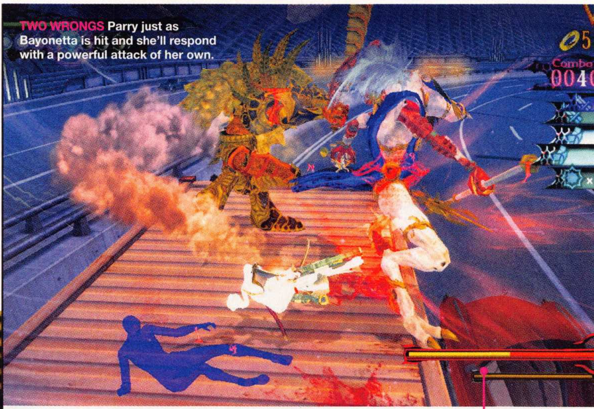
6

DON'T F*CK WITH A WITCH

Penultimate boss, Balder isn't just evil—he combs his hair with a feather and wears a golden faceplate monocle. He's a cheap fighter too, calling on satellite death rays and killing several of your hair demons before refilling his health bar mid-scrap. Bayonetta not only kicks his ass, but then announces "Don't f*ck with a witch," loads her gun with a lipstick bullet and lets you steer it straight into the bastard's forehead.



BACKTALK This moment is only topped by punching God into the sun.



TWO WRONGS Parry just as Bayonetta is hit and she'll respond with a powerful attack of her own.

7

THE MAGIC OF A GOOD PARRY

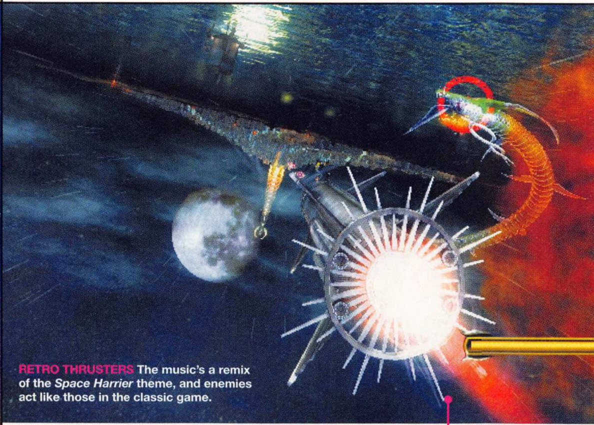
We've no idea what "The Moon Of Mahaa-Kalaa" means, but it's amazing. Buy it from Rodin, equip it, and you have a new defensive move in your arsenal—the parry. And unlike in cheaper fighters like *Devil May Cry,* the parry in *Bayonetta* is usable. It even adds a counter if you get the movement just right, making it (in our opinion) the best parry move ever. A real treat for your second playthrough.

FIGHT TO WIN On Hard, *Bayonetta* becomes the best fighting game ever made, without a doubt.

8

HARD MODE & INFINITE CLIMAX

Bayonetta is better than everything ever because the first runthrough is a tutorial. When you restart on Hard with a tooled-up witch, it remixes the fights and throws the tough enemies at you from the start. The split-second dodges and counters punctuate a new level of fluidity as you begin to glimpse the possibilities of this perfect combat system. And Infinite Climax with Witch Time disabled? Insanity.



RETRO THRUSTERS The music's a remix of the *Space Harrier* theme, and enemies act like those in the classic game.

9

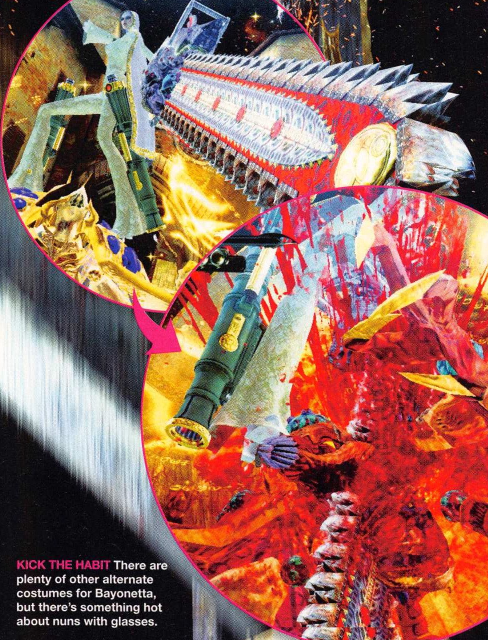
GO, MUMMY!

If you've played *Space Harrier,* you know what this is all about. If you haven't, it's still fantastic. Seven minutes of spinning, blasting, braindead nonsense as Bayonetta rides a missile into the heart of the enemy base with her daughter on top, cheering her on. The entire menagerie of bad guys are transformed into shoot-'em-up staples trying to stop your bonkers progress, but you're not going to let them touch your daughter, right? Maternal instincts have never blown up so many bad guys.

10

TORTURING ENEMIES AS A NUN

In *Bayonetta,* you get to make anyone who dares to attack you squirm. Build up your magic meter, then conjure a chainsaw behind your back and cut your foes in half, crush them in a giant pair of hands, or just dropkick them straight into an iron maiden. Oh, and you can do it all dressed as a nun. Is that so wrong?



KICK THE HABIT There are plenty of other alternate costumes for Bayonetta, but there's something hot about nuns with glasses.

The ones we didn't pick...

THE AMAZING SOUNDTRACK
It's hard to say why remixes of "Fly Me to the Moon," a pile of classic Sega themes, and fresh J-Pop make the best beat-'em-up background music you could wish for, but they do.

THE IN-JOKES
It's crammed with them, from *Dragon Ball Z* to *Resident Evil* and back by way of *Halo* and *Assassin's Creed.* They're a good laugh, but there are so many other amazing things in here that they just miss out.

ANGEL ATTACK!
A mini-game where you shoot angels in the head to bag points for prizes. It's simple, but fun.

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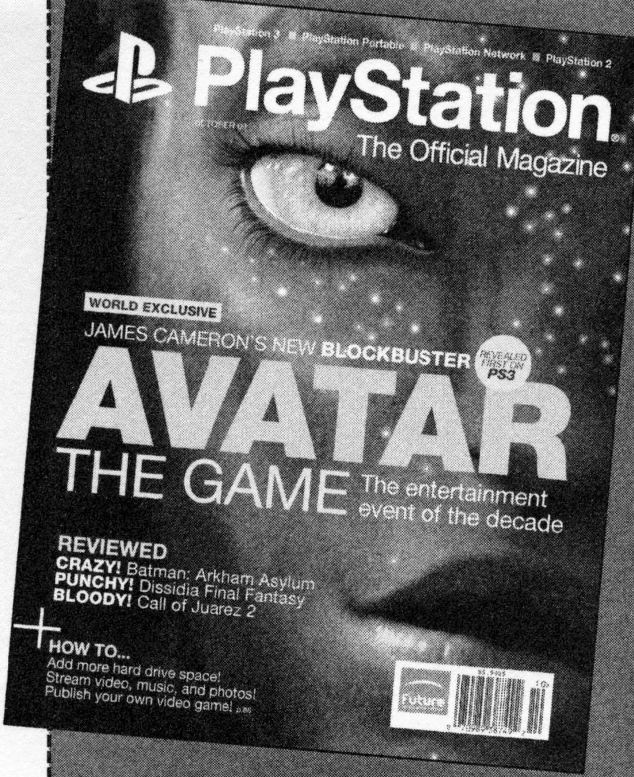

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STAR SYSTEM

HOW IT WORKS

5 STARS: Legendary
A game so amazing, the entire PTOM staff recommends it. A must buy!

4 STARS: Great
A finely crafted, thoroughly enjoyable experience. Worth your time and money.

3 STARS: Enjoyable
If the topic/license/style is your thing, there's enough to keep you entertained.

2 STARS: Scarred
A smattering of entertainment hidden amongst an abundance of flaws.

1 STAR: A Flop
We played it so you don't have to. Now you owe us cookies.

PlayStation
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★★★★★
Editors' Choice

FINAL FANTASY XIII

Totally tubular

PS3 PRICE: **$59.99** ESRB: **Teen** PUBLISHER: **Square Enix** DEVELOPER: **Square Enix**

No towns. No magic gauges. No experience points. For a game so long in development and so eagerly anticipated for years, it's odd that *Final Fantasy XIII* can, at least partially, be defined by what it lacks. In fact, characters have only three overt stats: Health (HP), Strength, and Magic. That's it!

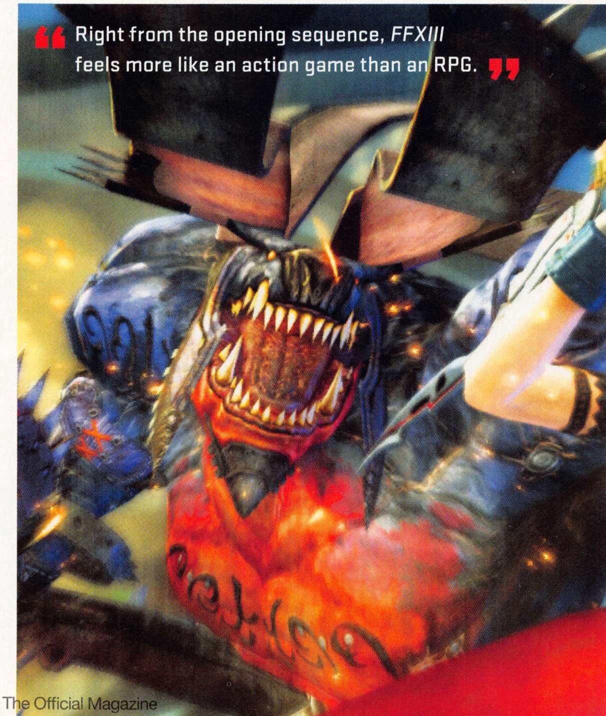
Shocked? We were too—at first. But once we were locked in battle against a freakish cherub-faced cybernetic demigod bent on world destruction, stats were the furthest thing from our minds.

Paradigm shift

Traditional JRPGs usually follow a template: Start in a town, travel through a dungeon to the next town, and repeat until you reach the final boss, with plenty of long cutscenes peppered throughout. *FFXIII* completely tosses aside that formula. Right from the opening sequence—which throws you into the action almost immediately, rather than prefacing itself with a lengthy expository cutscene—the game feels more like an action game than an RPG.

Most of the game is completely linear (almost literally so). We often had no choice but to travel down what's basically a tube, encountering enemies and cutscenes in a tightly controlled manner. But what we lost in control was more than made up for by what we gained in every other aspect. Square Enix has taken a genre it knows inside out and trimmed away all the fat, leaving a lean, streamlined, and highly focused experience. *FFXIII* tells the story it wants to tell, how and when it wants to tell it. Our task was to follow along, and develop the technical skills in battle to carry our characters through their story.

Traditionalists may find this stifling at times, but that's missing the point. Our take? *FFXIII* has finally embraced the true nature of the series, which has always been about a set narrative with characters that you can only control in as much as you shape their abilities or pick what armor they wear and what weapons they wield. The role-playing has always been an



> "Right from the opening sequence, *FFXIII* feels more like an action game than an RPG."

← Five things to note if you're new to Final Fantasy

BOSS BATTLES are serious business. Dying is inevitable. Change up your strategy if what you're doing isn't working.

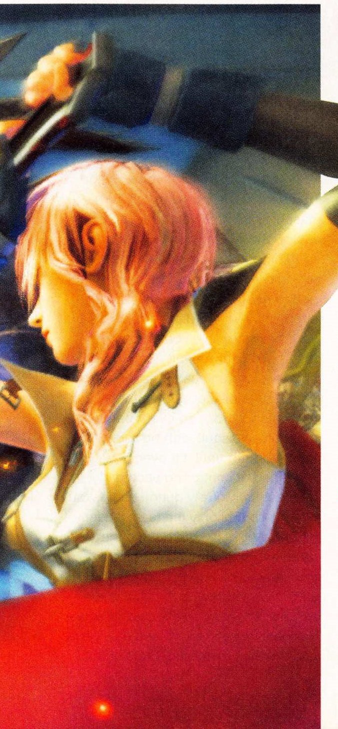
REFLEXES COUNT Just because it's an RPG doesn't mean you can diddle around menu surfing during battles—the Active Time Battle system means you have to act fast, all the time.

MAGIC DINOSAURS The world is an even mix of science fiction and fantasy, so fighting superpowered prehistoric beasts using futuristic gadgets is quite normal.

STUPEFYING STORIES The narrative may be completely comprehensible one moment and totally convoluted the next. Don't think—just roll with it.

CRYSTALS are like, really important. Always.

↗ Watch out for the flan—they can be surprisingly formidable at times.



↙ Characters must defeat their Eidolon to unlock it.

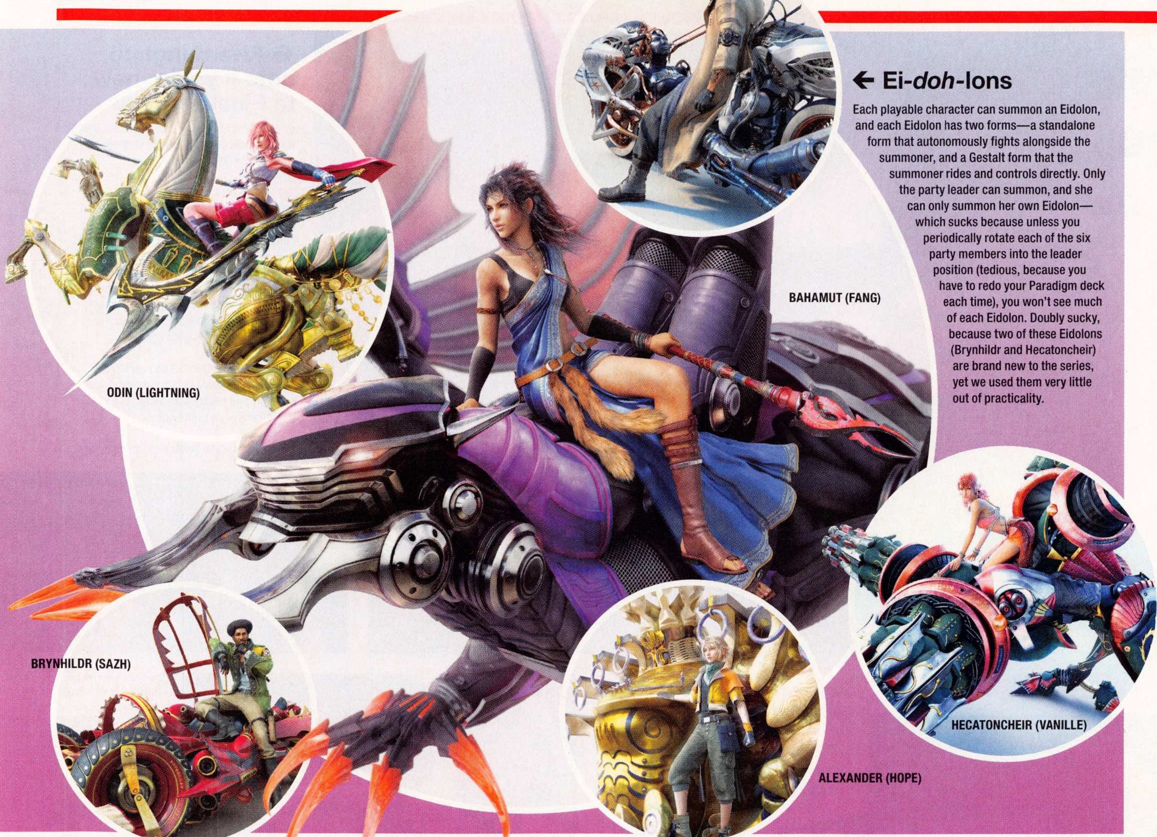
illusion—a faux-freedom to wander around towns and chat with NPCs that lent the previous games a superficial feeling of control that often occurred at the expense of the narrative pacing. Here, game flow takes precedence, leaving behind our outdated notions of what a JRPG should be. And once we fully let those expectations go, it's impossible not to marvel at what *FFXIII* accomplishes.

This regimented format ties in with the central theme of its story as well; just as you have no control over your path, so protagonist Lightning and her teammates have been set on a course by powers beyond *their* control, and it will take everything they have to break free of the shackles that bind them to an inevitably grim fate.

Resist or serve

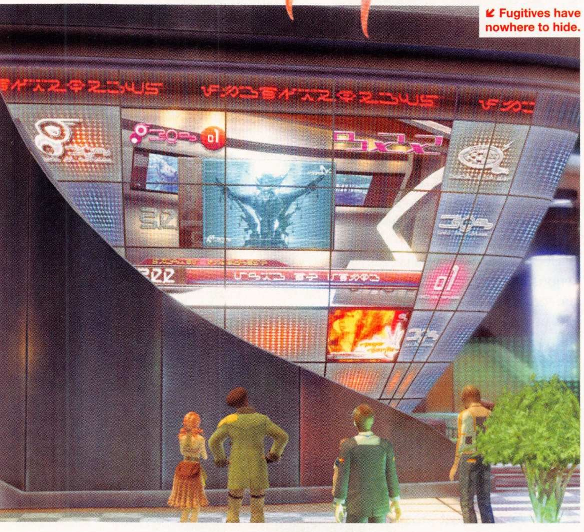
Lightning's story begins on a moon-like satellite called Cocoon, which as its name suggests, is sealed from the outside world. Although small and isolated, it's a technologically advanced utopia, with flying motorcycles cutting across the skies over resort-style beaches and fantastical theme parks full of gentle Chocobos. The idyllic setting comes at a price, though—god-like beings called fal'Cie are using the Sanctum, a human puppet government, to wield ultimate power over their subjects.

Below Cocoon lies Pulse, a mysterious planet that Cocoon's citizens are forbidden to visit. While no one has ever seen it, Pulse is (according to those in power) a living hell, a hostile climate full of predatory monsters beyond description. Society lives in constant fear of Pulse invasion, and if anyone is suspected of even remotely coming in contact with any Pulse influence, they're ruthlessly and permanently jettisoned down to the world they fear most—that



← Ei-*doh*-lons

Each playable character can summon an Eidolon, and each Eidolon has two forms—a standalone form that autonomously fights alongside the summoner, and a Gestalt form that the summoner rides and controls directly. Only the party leader can summon, and she can only summon her own Eidolon—which sucks because unless you periodically rotate each of the six party members into the leader position (tedious, because you have to redo your Paradigm deck each time), you won't see much of each Eidolon. Doubly sucky, because two of these Eidolons (Brynhildr and Hecatoncheir) are brand new to the series, yet we used them very little out of practicality.


↙ Fugitives have nowhere to hide.

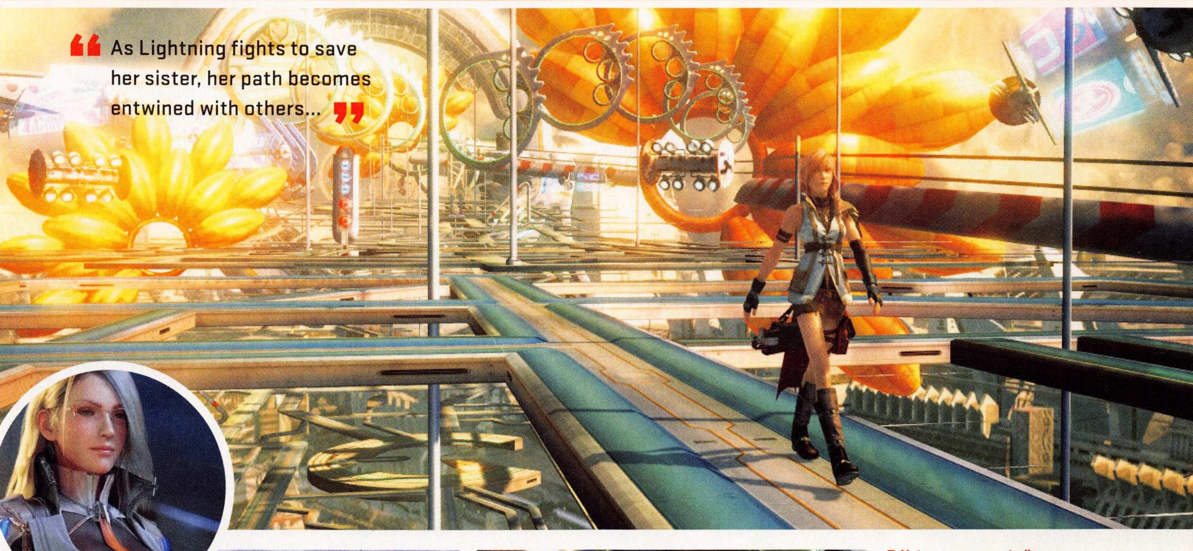
is, if they're not simply gunned down by fearful Sanctum troops first.

A soldier herself until the first Pulse contamination scare occurs, Lightning defects when her sister Serah is among those about to be purged. As she fights to save her sister, her path becomes entwined with others who share a similar fate, like Sazh, a father who desperately wants to save his young son whom the Sanctum has taken hostage, and Snow, Serah's devoted husband-to-be and general pain-in-the-ass hotshot. And then there's Vanille…but we won't even go there. As you'd expect, everything after the first few hours is one spoiler after another. Even with the occasional outlandishness of a typical *Final Fantasy* plot though, the characters are thoroughly believable and even relatable, and we felt fully invested in each one of Lightning's crew.

Old and new

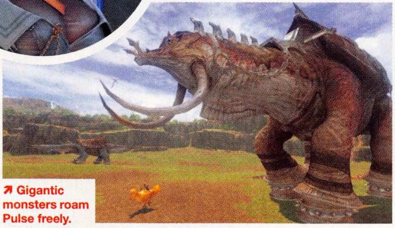
A staple of the series, the Active Time Battle system pioneered in *FFIV* returns here with some major updates. Unlike slow, purely turn-based systems where time isn't a factor, the ATB system forces you to think quickly, since all movement, ally and enemy alike, is based on an action gauge that refills constantly, even while you're deciding what your next move will be. The object is to have your moves queued up and ready to unleash as soon as your gauge fills, and to never let a full gauge sit idly, so every battle is a nonstop assault with no room to take a breath until it's over.

Instead of controlling each party member individually during battle, you directly control only the team leader, while giving general orders to the other two active members through the Paradigm system. During battle, a Paradigm is always in place that assigns a specific role to each ally, like designating two teammates to offense and the third to healing. Each of the

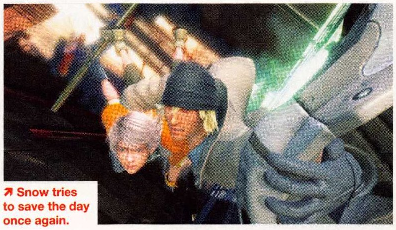


> "As Lightning fights to save her sister, her path becomes entwined with others..."

↖ Not your average sterile utopia, Cocoon is full of vibrant colors. Bright yellow-orange Chocobo feathers adorn many public places.



↗ Gigantic monsters roam Pulse freely.



↗ Snow tries to save the day once again.

six roles can only perform one type of action—Commandos and Ravagers can only attack, Medics can only heal, Saboteurs and Synergists can only cast status effects, and Sentinels can only defend. Paradigms can be chosen from a customizable deck on the fly by hitting L1 during battle, so while you're responsible for the leader's actions, you're also coordinating a whole team as you decide which Paradigm to employ as battle conditions change. You might choose to attack all out at the start of battle and only fall back to a defensive posture as needed to heal, or for bigger enemies you might want to start with a bevy of buffs and debuffs before proceeding.

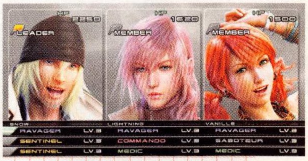
At first, the battle system feels almost too automatic, since you only have to make general decisions about how each character should behave, and you can even use an auto-command function on your lead party member so that she will automatically execute an optimal action from her basic repertoire for her current role (for other actions, like using items, special techniques and summoning, you have to input it manually). But as the going gets tougher (and believe us, it gets difficult), the nuances of the Paradigm system reveal themselves and the battles become more complex and absorbing, rather than less so.

Crystal clear

Similar to *FFX's* sphere grid (but way more user-friendly), each character has a Crystarium for each Paradigm role, and you can specialize each in specific roles as you see fit. With six playable characters to customize as you like, the possibilities for developing Paradigm strategies are vast. Adding to the mix, each enemy has a Stagger gauge that you fill by chaining your attacks rapidly, and when full the enemy is open to massive amounts of damage for a limited time. This adds another dimension to your strategy, since being too conservative will fail to stagger an enemy and prolong a battle needlessly, yet attacking too aggressively might open your party up to a KO. Enemy types vary greatly as well, with different strengths, weaknesses, behaviors and stagger rates, which forces you to utilize a variety of Paradigms and keeps the battles engaging.

In or out of battle, this game is gorgeous. It's almost surreal to finally play a *Final Fantasy* where the difference between gameplay and cutscene graphics isn't jarringly obvious. (We even found ourselves studying "hair-flowiness" to determine if a cutscene's graphics were in-game or CG.) But the graphics only represent the topmost layer of a pervasive meticulousness, and every last detail feels thoroughly polished. Whether you agree with the design choices—the forced linearity and lack of exploration—everything is deliberately and carefully considered. Yes, you may feel like you're traveling through a tube most of the time, but it's the most awesome tube ever. | Carolyn Gudmundson

Rating ★★★★★



↑ Stacking the deck

Building a diverse roster of Paradigms to handle any situation is absolutely key, and every role has its benefits and weaknesses when paired with other roles.

COMMANDO Hits hard with boosted physical and magic attacks, but doesn't fill enemy chain gauges quickly.

RAVAGER Attacks with magic. Does less damage than Commando but fills enemy chain gauges quickly.

MEDIC Heals, removes status ailments, and can revive KOed teammates, but the party's attacks do less damage while Medic is present.

SYNERGIST Applies status boosts to party members and extends the duration of their effects. Ailments to enemies also last longer.

SABOTEUR Opposite of Synergist. Inflicts status ailments on enemies and boosts success rates of the entire party.

SENTINEL Draws enemy fire to protect other party members, and can counterattack, but can't attack directly. Applies damage reduction to the entire party.

Found a squad that actually works well together? Add them to your Friends List.

MAG

We're all in this together

PS3 **PRICE:** $59.99 **ESRB:** Teen **PUBLISHER:** SCEA **DEVELOPER:** Zipper Interactive

Two-hundred fifty-six players on a single battlefield? It sounded impossible when *MAG* was first announced—and frankly, it still sounds impossible. But it works. We spent days battling for profit and power in *MAG's* "shadow war" and never experienced significant lag or waited for more than a minute to be placed in a full match. We did witness the occasional frozen player on the battlefield—a victim of some localized connection problem—but overall, *MAG's* network coding is a technical marvel.

Unfortunately, its massive scale is a double-edged sword: It's impressive, to be sure, but it can easily result in maddening chaos. Though you may eventually grow to love *MAG* (and there's a lot to love), the first 10 hours are painfully unforgiving. All too often, we had no idea what we were supposed to be doing—and without a sense of purpose, matches devolved into aimless running interrupted only by a trip back to the spawn site after being shot by some guy we never saw.

The game imposes an opt-in leadership structure to stem this frustrating slide into chaos, but the majority of the chatter that came through our headset consisted of desperate

↘ *MAG*'s nine maps are massive. Depending on where you spawn, you might not even recognize a familiar map until well into the round.

Almost every game mode has you either attacking or defending objectives. No Capture the Flag here.

Give it time. As everyone gets better, so will the game itself.

pleas for a nearby medic. A few of our squad leaders never said a word, and most players didn't seem aware of the benefits of following orders and sticking close to your commanding officer—such as experience bonuses and faster reload times. The incentives for cooperation are there, but at least in our war games, many of the other combatants seemed unwilling to play well with others.

Of course, it's possible that they didn't know how. The game does a very poor job of advertising and explaining its more nuanced features. The tutorial—which is essentially "First-Person Shooters 101"—covers how to crouch and shoot, but doesn't explain what a Frago is (it's an order issued on-the-fly by a squad leader). The only guidance you get is a cluttered heads-up display full of icons whose meaning you have to decipher while people are shooting at you.

Darkest before the dawn

We have to emphasize, however, we came to appreciate the game's inner workings, and when we found a squad that operated as a unit, *MAG* is exhilarating. During one particular 256-player match, with some excellent planning our squad grabbed every available Humvee and turret and fortified our bunker. And the enemy wasn't able to capture a single objective. It was breathtaking.

The game hit its stride once we reached level 15, at which point we had 15 experience points to upgrade our soldier and unlock our leadership abilities. Until this occurs, it's easy to feel like just another cog in the war machine, and to forget that our actions really do contribute to a larger battle. But as a leader, we started to feel powerful and in control, which allowed us to better appreciate the epic scope of each match.

Beyond all the hype about size and scope, however, *MAG* is a standard shooter at heart. Fortunately, the game's basic mechanics feel solid and polished—meaning it's quite fun to run around with a gun in your hands. Movements feel tight, aiming is responsive, and the physical feedback you receive from unloading a clip into an enemy is gratifying as ever. The world is a bit generic, and earning your way to better weapons and abilities is a painful grind with a somewhat negligible payoff, but overall, *MAG* makes a damn fine soldier.

Still, *MAG* relies a bit too much on the players to *make* the game fun. It takes considerable time and a *lot* of teamwork for it to reach its full potential. Essentially, playing this game is an investment, one that requires real commitment. It's unique, ambitious, and undoubtedly impressive—and if you embrace *MAG*, you *will* have fun…eventually. | Scott Butterworth

Rating ★★★⯪☆

> “ Though you may eventually grow to love MAG (and there's a lot to love), the first 10 hours are painfully unforgiving. All too often, we had no idea what we were supposed to be doing. ”

Zip Tips →

Zipper Interactive designer BEN JONES shares his secrets for *MAG* domination. Lock and load, soldiers.

FOR BEGINNERS

"The biggest thing is to play with your squad. That's so key with *MAG*. If you're communicating with them and coordinating with your squad leader, you're going to be really effective. From there, stick with your leaders, follow their orders, and make sure you're always healing your allies, not letting them bleed out. Really push the flow of battle forward."

FOR LEADERS

"Communication is critical. As a platoon commander, you can change between channels and talk to the various squad commanders within your platoon. As OIC [Officer In Charge], you can send a platoon-wide broadcast to say, 'Hey, this is what we're really pushing for now'—so that is important. The other thing is calling in effective strikes. You have these amazing special abilities, but it's important that you use them at the right time and that you use them effectively. A good example is when you're taking out the AA guns on larger maps: Once you destroy it you can maybe get one wave of parachute jumps in before the enemy regroups and repairs it. An effective tactic for a commander is to destroy the AA then immediately throw down an airstrike on it, denying the enemy any chance to repair it."

TOP CUSTOM LOADOUTS

"The one I've been using a lot recently is the shotgun with red-dot sight and a faster reload ability. I use an SMG as a backup, an upgraded medical kit, an acoustic locator, and just regular hand-grenades. That means you're really effective in close quarters, and with the acoustic locator you can track any enemies coming at you. It's great for defending. If I'm a sniper, I take the motion sensor every time. It's huge, because it allows you to track any enemies on the map at any time, even if they're hiding in long grass. You also want to upgrade optics. Increased stability is important too, so you'll need the custom foregrip or the deployable bipod. Play around with your character options in terms of your camo too, to help you blend into the scenery better."

DANTE'S INFERNO

The Devil is in the details

PS3 PRICE: **$59.99** ESRB: **Mature** PUBLISHER: **Electronic Arts** DEVELOPER: **Visceral Games**

The first time we meet Dante, he's sewing a cloth crimson crucifix into his bare chest. Sure, all the kids are doing it. But it's just gross, susceptible to infection, and frankly, doesn't speak well of his upbringing. Is it any wonder that he's off on some damn fool idealistic crusade?

But it's not the Crusades that really concern us; it's Dante's journey to Hell. Long story short and one classic epic poem conveniently mangled for narrative purposes, Dante dies—but being a badass knight, he battles and defeats Death, steals his scythe, and heads home to Italy and his true love Beatrice. His sweet homecoming is short-lived, though, as he discovers that both Beatrice and his father have been murdered. Not one to take mortality lying down, Dante's off through the nine circles of Hell to recover his beloved's soul.

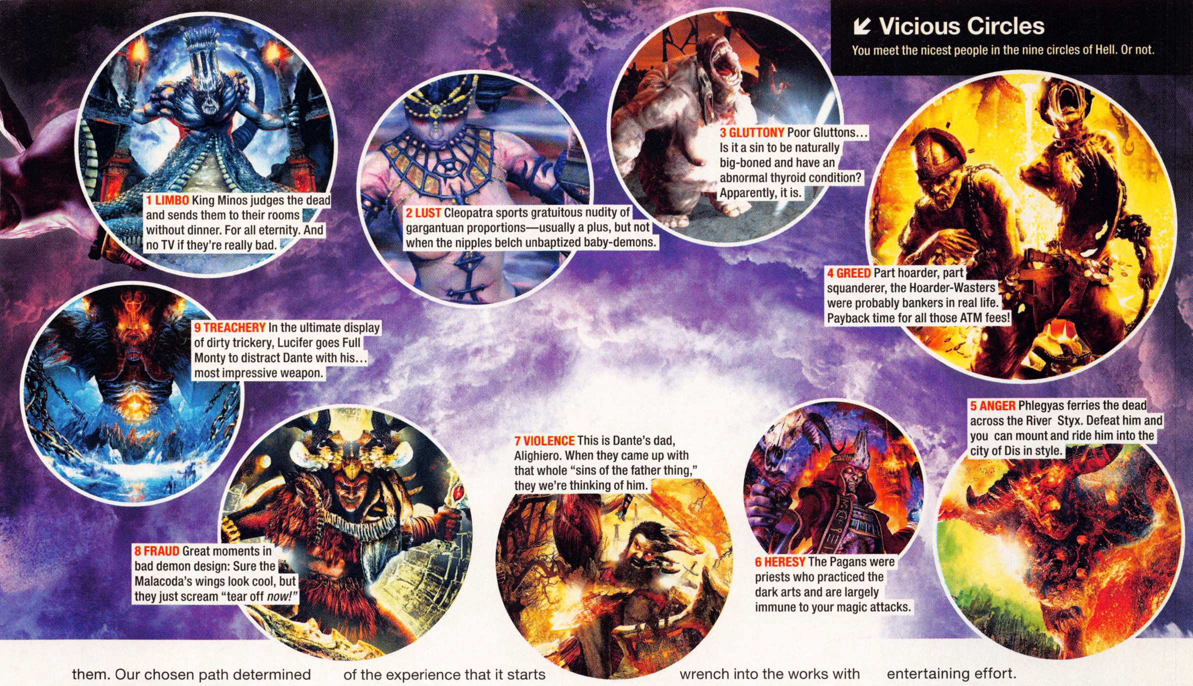
Hell of a place you've got here

As you'd expect, Hell isn't very pleasant. Sinners of every ilk are being tormented and tortured or squished and squashed, and everybody's constantly whining about how they're sorry and didn't mean it. Oh, boohoo. What's unexpected is how fervently *Dante's Inferno* seeks to earn its Mature rating. There's blood, gore, and disgusting imagery galore, but the game seems intent on setting a new standard for gratuitous nudity—female *and* male. Whether *Inferno's* efforts to shock seem offensive, titillating, or contrived depends on your personal tastes, but there's no denying that the game's haunting vision of Hell is one of its highlights.

Guiding Dante through Hell's trials and travails is a generally satisfying experience. The *God of War*-style control scheme is solid enough, and our crusader's repertoire of light- and heavy-attack fueled animations are smooth and entertainingly brutal. Dante also carries Beatrice's Holy Cross, which enables ranged attacks, and he can enhance his lethalness and durability via a system of acquirable magic spells and artifacts. We also have a choice in how we play: follow the righteous Holy path by absolving enemies and notable historical sinners, or the merciless Unholy path by skewering

Vicious Circles

You meet the nicest people in the nine circles of Hell. Or not.



1 LIMBO King Minos judges the dead and sends them to their rooms without dinner. For all eternity. And no TV if they're really bad.

2 LUST Cleopatra sports gratuitous nudity of gargantuan proportions—usually a plus, but not when the nipples belch unbaptized baby-demons.

3 GLUTTONY Poor Gluttons… Is it a sin to be naturally big-boned and have an abnormal thyroid condition? Apparently, it is.

4 GREED Part hoarder, part squanderer, the Hoarder-Wasters were probably bankers in real life. Payback time for all those ATM fees!

5 ANGER Phlegyas ferries the dead across the River Styx. Defeat him and you can mount and ride him into the city of Dis in style.

6 HERESY The Pagans were priests who practiced the dark arts and are largely immune to your magic attacks.

7 VIOLENCE This is Dante's dad, Alighiero. When they came up with that whole "sins of the father thing," they we're thinking of him.

8 FRAUD Great moments in bad demon design: Sure the Malacoda's wings look cool, but they just scream "tear off *now!*"

9 TREACHERY In the ultimate display of dirty trickery, Lucifer goes Full Monty to distract Dante with his… most impressive weapon.

them. Our chosen path determined what type of moves and upgrades we unlocked, but had no real impact on the game's ultimate outcome.

Where's the burn?

While *Dante's Inferno* doesn't exhibit much gameplay innovation, everything works well and the lack of originality is of little concern when you're slicing and dicing your way to a 100-hit combo. But it's when you consider the broader emotional arc of the experience that it starts to feel like a detour through Purgatory rather than the furious assault on Hell it's meant to be. The journey that initially begins with memorable face-offs against Charon, King Minos, and especially Cleopatra soon tapers off into a predictable routine of waves of minion battles, exploratory jaunts, and environmental puzzles, capped by an obligatory boss battle. The eighth circle of Hell in particular throws a flow-killing wrench into the works with its 10 challenges that are better suited for an introductory tutorial than as the final hurdles before your showdown with Lucifer.

Yes, there are memorable gameplay sequences throughout *Inferno*—defeating then mounting and wreaking havoc on giant beasts like the Minotaur and Phlegyas is always good fun. And if you consider all of the game's individual elements, it is undoubtedly a solid, entertaining effort.

Yet, it's the *God of War* franchise's uncanny ability to elevate familiar gameplay elements with an extreme attention to detail, and *then* infuse it with an inspired vision, that keeps it the standard bearer for the action genre. But if you just can't get enough of *GoW*-style gameplay, *Dante's Inferno* is still a hell of a good time. | Roger Burchill

Rating ★★★★☆

↙ After a battle to the…er, death, Death's own scythe becomes Dante's primary weapon.

↘ The three-headed Cerberus guards the gates of Gluttony. And you thought pit bulls were nasty.

BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2

Not bad at all

PS3 **PRICE:** $59.99 **ESRB:** Mature **PUBLISHER:** Electronic Arts **DEVELOPER:** DICE

The surprise success of 2008's *Battlefield: Bad Company* proved that this fledgling franchise could offer PC-quality multiplayer on a console, with gorgeous, screen-stretching destruction that had us turning buildings into flaming piles of kindling. So, we totally expected *Bad Company 2's* multiplayer to rock us harder than a grenade in a foxhole. What we didn't plan on was being blown away by the title's refreshingly robust 13-mission single-player campaign.

Once again we're put behind the crosshairs and muzzle flashes of Private Marlowe, who's joined by B-Company mates Haggard, Sweetwater, and Sarge. Almost immediately, we noticed a good deal of testosterone's been drained from the ragtag foursome's quippy dialog; sure, there's still plenty of "booyah-ing" and buddy cop-like banter, but it now actually complements the narrative in a way that allows us to better connect with the characters.

The first game's solo run was a credible attempt, but weak AI and a general lack of polish left it feeling more like the tacked-on opening act to the multiplayer main event.

↗ The Sounds of Battle

Complementing *BC2's* chaos are some of the best weapon effects our aural canals have ever been bathed in. In this generation it's expected that guns will pop, crack, and boom with the clarity of their real-world counterparts, but *BC2* raises the standard, adding immersion-amping variations such as accurate muffles and echoes when our surroundings call for them. Equally impressive are the layers of ambient sounds. Walking through a shallow stream during a rainstorm, we were able to pick up specific tracks for our splashing footsteps, the trickling precipitation, cracking thunder and, of course, whatever death-dealer we were clutching.

↙ On foot or in a tank, *BC2's* destruction effects are impressive.

↙ Framerate and pop-in issues occasionally mar the gorgeous view.

BC2's one-player campaign fixes all the first game's flaws and, as if waggling a big, fat finger at the competition's comparatively bite-sized story modes, packs a length that makes it worth a purchase even if you don't plan to join the online melee.

Mass destruction

Of course, this is a war game, not a Lifetime movie. So as much as we adore the B boys, we're far more interested in filling our HDTVs with furious firefights and eye-melting explosions than exchanging jokes with the quirky chopper pilot. Thankfully, *BC2* doesn't disappoint, letting us degrade cover, create new paths, and pretty much ventilate anything that gets in our way—including evildoers' chest cavities.

While we love turning picket fences into blurs of flying matchsticks, or adding exits to buildings in locations never intended by their original architects, it's when this tech is being used against us that it has us choking on our hearts. Defending a building, or being pinned down in a structure while waiting for backup to arrive, can make for some incredibly nerve-wracking moments when Volkswagen-sized holes are being blown through the walls all around you. Teaching a baddie that a plywood wall never makes a good cover spot is strategically rewarding, but expect your blood pressure to spike past any doctor-recommended level when you're on the receiving end of an RPG blast.

The only drawback to *BC2's* all-hell-breaking-loose magic is that it doesn't work on everything in the environment; when we can reduce towering structures to a pile of splinters but can't put more than a dent in an old wooden chair, a bit of realism is robbed from the overall experience.

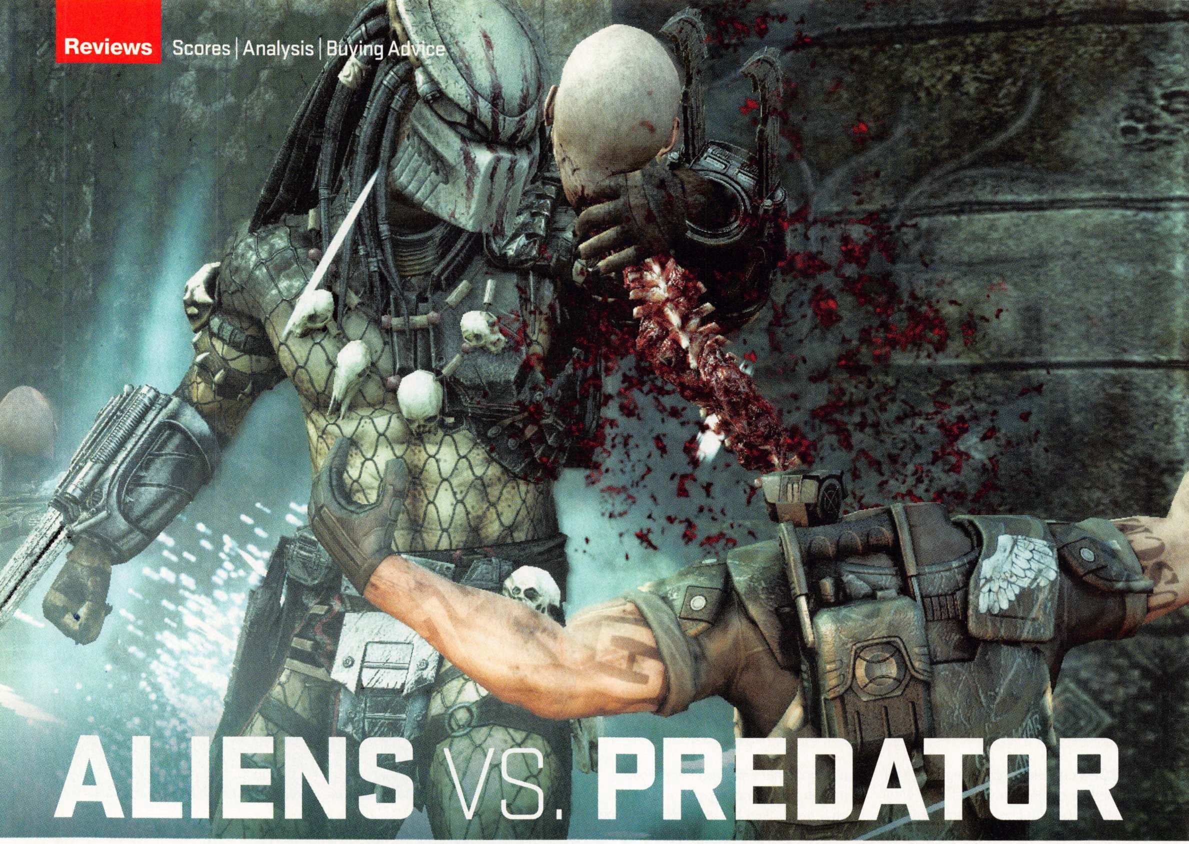
Online offensive

BC2's multiplayer doesn't disappoint its fraggin' fan base with four modes, four character classes, 10 maps, 15 vehicles, and a *Modern Warfare*-like perk system that gave us plenty of new reasons to kill friends. The new team-based Squad Deathmatch and Squad Rush join returning modes Rush and Conquest. But Squad Rush is the highlight, placing two teams of four on tighter maps and tasking them with defending or attacking critical points. The focus on squad tactics yields some intense encounters, as the ability to respawn near mates and share enemy locations adds strategic elements while also keeping the action—and our adrenaline—flowing.

In addition to the standard FPS gameplay, *BC2* separates itself from the me-too military shooter pack by putting us behind the wheels and turrets of a variety of land, air, and sea vehicles. Whether we're raining down death from above with an attack chopper's mounted cannon, or piloting a patrol boat while peppering coastline-squatting enemies with launched grenades, we loved unleashing hell from the comfort of the cockpit. Vehicle gameplay breaks up the solo missions' frantic on-foot action nicely, but it becomes a strategic game-changer during online matches; we wish we could've seen the looks on our opponents' faces whenever we had a battle tank's main gun barrel nipping at their backsides.

The modern military FPS genre is as crowded as a mess hall at chow time, but *BC2* has managed to inject plenty of freshness into its firefights with an engaging single-player yarn and a host of defining online features. While *Modern Warfare 2* may yet hold the FPS battlefield, *Bad Company 2* serves notice that this war ain't over yet. | Matt Cabral

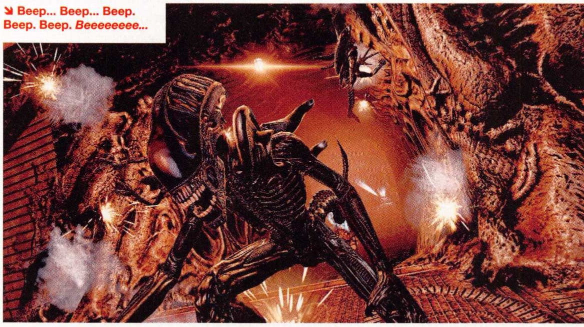
Rating ★★★★⯪



ALIENS VS. PREDATOR

And humans. Don't forget the humans

PS3 PRICE: **$59.99** ESRB: **Mature** PUBLISHER: **Sega** DEVELOPER: **Rebellion**



↘ Beep... Beep... Beep. Beep. Beep. *Beeeeeeee...*

Forget 2010 with its abundance of AAA titles. Sega has something different in mind. With *Aliens vs. Predator,* they're hoping you'll party like it's 1999.

Laugh it up if you like—but listen. We're keenly aware *AvP* isn't going to wow anyone with fresh ideas. And the fact that developer Rebellion made the original FPS *Alien vs. Predator* on the PC over a decade ago hasn't been lost on us either. We know *Aliens vs. Predator* is old, and we're well aware that the last handful of movies *stank,* too.

And yet that decade of disappointment hasn't stopped us from hankering for the ultimate three-way: a gory, blood-spattered face-off between the trio of species is still a fantastic idea—if done right.

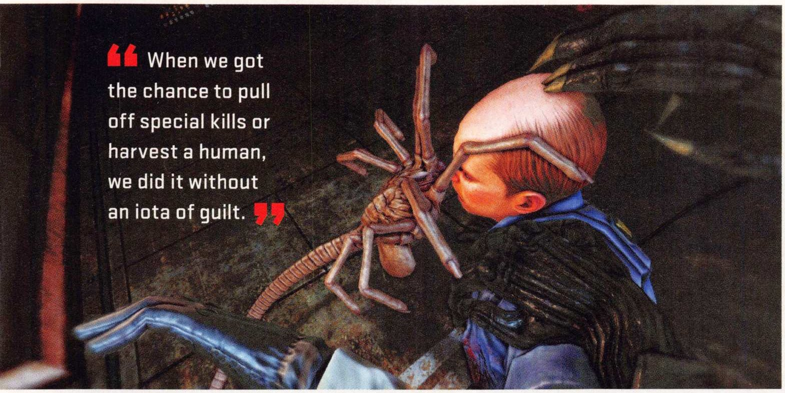
The good news: *AvP* delivers. This is a first-person shooter in which you take on the role of humans, aliens, and predators in a thrilling game of survival. And as a bonus for old-school fans, the game is packed with authentic details steeped in the mythos of the original movies and comic books. Rebellion raided Fox's libraries of sound effects, models, and designs, and the original story features the voice acting and appearance of Lance Henriksen (Bishop in *Aliens)* as the head of the Weyland-Utani Corporation, Karl Bishop Weyland.

Triple play

The three single-player campaigns all revolve around the same central story, and can be played in any order you like. While each is short and unfolds through the same general landscapes, they play very differently.

We started with the Colonial Marines, who are called upon to help a colony of scientists (and their families) studying the creatures on a remote planet. Naturally, the Marines are individually weaker than an Alien or Predator, but in high enough numbers, they can hold their own against the big bugs. Their campaign occurs almost entirely in the dark with a flashlight and motion detector, and you *will* experience genuine scary-movie fear.

Next, we took on the Alien campaign, which plays out from the perspective of "Number 6," a captured Alien that's been enslaved and studied from birth to adulthood by Weyland's research team. The most amazing thing about this story arc: Rebellion actually creates some real empathy for Number 6, and so when we got the chance to escape and pull off special kills (numerous gory finishers totally worth exploring) or harvest a human (plant a face hugger on a captured foe), we did it without an iota of guilt. That said, we still struggled with the Alien's ability to transition to different surfaces, which doesn't happen as quickly or smoothly as it should.



> “When we got the chance to pull off special kills or harvest a human, we did it without an iota of guilt.”

↖ The Colonial Marines' strengths are guns and numbers. One out of two is bad.

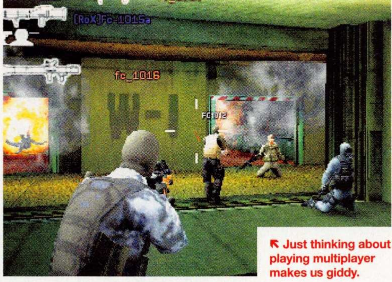
Finally, we jumped into the Predator's suit. This time, we followed the story of “Young Blood,” a newly trained Predator who must vanquish his wrongly killed brothers by returning to the ancient Predator hunting temple and slaying old foes (Aliens) and killing new ones (the Marines). Once again, the central levels are the same, but this time we experienced it from the heights of the treetops and rooftops, using a range of weaponry including our cloaking device, heat visor, plasma caster, spear, mines, and disc. To fully appreciate the Predator, we had to temporarily swear off caffeine. His slow, deliberate style, when mastered, makes him the most powerful character in the game. But the learning curve to success is steeper than that of his adversaries, and his true power is unleashed via special attacks that require lots of planning.

Multiple kills

The ultimate *Aliens vs. Predator* experience, however, isn't the single-player game. It's the enormously fun multiplayer mode. The basic Deathmatch is an easy four-hour time-killer, but with variations like Predator Hunt, Species Death Match, Infestation, Domination, and Survival, this game will steal your weeknights and weekends. Holding off a surge of Aliens with a fellow Marine by your side is an awesome feeling—but the level of satisfaction is matched by tracking a human with the Predator's plasma caster (enemies explode into light and dust), or piercing your Alien tail through a Marine's spine and out his mouth. *AvP's* multiplayer is gory, gratifying, and will bring an evil little smile to your face. | Douglass C. Perry

Rating ★★★★☆

↙ Where's Bosley?



↖ Just thinking about playing multiplayer makes us giddy.

↙ Though *FB3* is set almost entirely in one country, it's got scenic variety.

SOCOM: U.S. NAVY SEALS FIRETEAM BRAVO 3

Saving the world...because the paycheck is great

PSP PRICE: **$39.99** ESRB: **Teen** PUBLISHER: **SCEA** DEVELOPER: **Slant Six**

SEALs gunning their way through city streets dressed as civilians sounds like an action flick, not another deliberately paced SOCOM sequel. That's exactly where *SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Fireteam Bravo 3* breaks away from its predecessors, and the switch from sneaking to slaughtering makes for a more exciting experience.

Buddy movie banter among the SEAL team members imbues each character with a memorable personality, and this encouraged us to keep them alive during the campaign's stealth, sabotage, and rescue missions. Careful tactics are rewarding in their own right, but what really kept us going was command equity, the lifeblood of *Fireteam Bravo 3.* High kill-counts, reviving wounded teammates, stealth kills, and completing bonus objectives earn equity, which can be spent on better rifles, sweeter sidearms, and accuracy-enhancing attachments such as scopes and grips. Better still, equity carries over to *Bravo's* online multiplayer where we can buy balaclavas, body armor, or business suits for our SEAL and mercenary avatars.

Equity is also earned via a cool custom-mission creator. Returning to campaign locales doesn't sound terribly interesting, but tweaking the mission type—demolishing, disarming, and assassinating are equally awesome assignments—keeps things exciting. And since bigger profits are tied to higher difficulties, tougher enemies, and going squadless, there's plenty of reason to take on diverse tasks for huge payouts.

The default setting is embarrassingly easy given the enemy soldiers' tendency to actively avoid cover—we opted to play on higher difficulties in both the campaign and custom missions. But since *Bravo* is the go-to game for competitive multiplayer on the PSP, we're willing to wager that online human opponents will be much more satisfying foes. Despite the game's inelegant controls—why is it necessary to tap up on D-pad to enter manual aiming, and hold the Left-shoulder button to strafe?—we'll still be spending a ton of time to earn enough coin to look cooler than everybody else. | Mitch Dyer

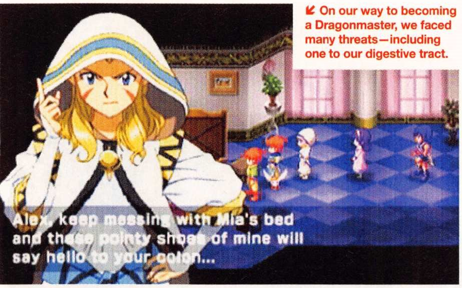
Rating ★★★★☆

↘ Smart and capable—and they follow orders too!

TORO
SANDMAN

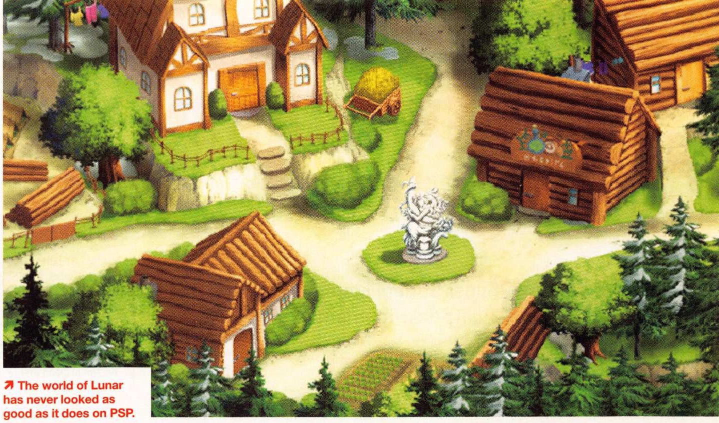
↘ CONFIDENTIAL

If you're reading this, you've been specifically selected for PTOM's top-secret "Disable" mission. To access the details, select custom mission from *Fireteam Bravo 3's* main menu and head to the snowy Stockpile in Northern Koratvia without any allies in tow. Good hunting, SEALs, on this Admiral-difficulty meat grinder.



Alex, keep messing with Mia's bed and these pointy shoes of mine will say hello to your colon...

↙ On our way to becoming a Dragonmaster, we faced many threats—including one to our digestive tract.



↗ The world of Lunar has never looked as good as it does on PSP.

LUNAR: SILVER STAR HARMONY

The moon still shines bright

PSP PRICE: $29.99/$39.99 (Limited Edition) ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: XSEED DEVELOPER: Game Arts/GungHo

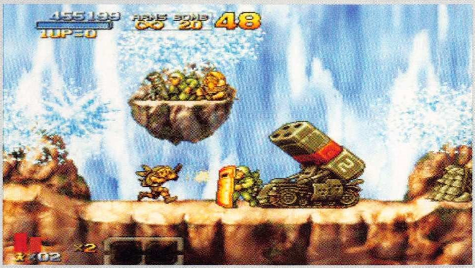
Great games never die; they just get remade. *Lunar: Silver Star Harmony* is a case in point. Birthed in the 16-bit era and updated for the original PlayStation, *Lunar* was an outstanding game back in the day, and it holds up remarkably well more than 15 years later.

If you haven't experienced *Lunar* before, you're missing out on an epic adventure. Though they represent traditional archetypes, the uniquely designed characters remain some of our all-time RPG favorites, and the touching coming-of-age story skillfully juggles an uncommon mix of action, comedy, and drama. The game also features a fantastic battle system. Although combat is menu-driven and turn-based, each hero and enemy has a movement range that requires them to get into position to attack, and that extra bit of strategy keeps every encounter interesting.

Even if you're familiar with *Lunar,* there are plenty of reasons to play this version, including new (albeit brief) cutscenes, and redesigned towns and dungeons. Plus, this is easily the best-looking version yet.

There are some flies in the ointment—frequent load times, annoying respawning enemies, and some story inconsistencies—but they don't significantly detract from an otherwise excellent game. | Frankie Evers

Rating ★★★★☆



↑ Your AI co-op partner excels at being useless.

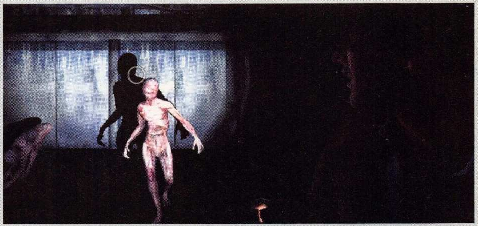
METAL SLUG XX

Never stop shooting

PSP PRICE: $19.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Atlus DEVELOPER: SNK Playmore

One of those rare series that refuses to evolve *or* die, *Metal Slug* has stuck by its 2D, *Contra*-style, action-parody guns for 14 years. *Metal Slug XX* (actually a new version of *Metal Slug 7)* is no exception; aside from slicker animation, new characters, new vehicles (including a screen-filling mech), and mission-based challenges disguised as a "training" mode, this is the same fast, tough, silly run-and-gun you'll find in nearly every other *Slug.* Although if you're a die-hard fan, that's likely enough. | Mikel Reparaz

Rating ★★★½☆



↑ Don't be afraid of the dark... Nevermind.

SILENT HILL: SHATTERED MEMORIES

Frozen in memory

PSP PRICE: $29.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Konami DEVELOPER: Climax

We've just regained consciousness after crashing on the side of a road, only to find that our daughter isn't in the passenger seat. Armed with just a cell phone and a flashlight, we never feel at ease with the wintry world around us—exactly what we want from a *Silent Hill* game. Our lack of weaponry makes running the *only* option in combat, which is a surprisingly fresh thrill. Great puzzles and psychological interviews that affect gameplay make *Shattered Memories* an engrossing experience that ends too soon. | Erik Belsaas

Rating ★★★★☆

MASTER CLASS

The two best arcade-quality stick controllers go head-to-head

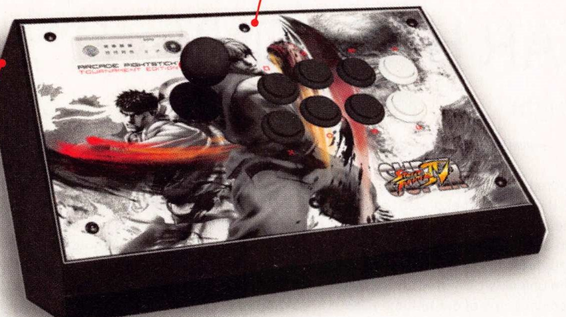
PlayStation
The Official Magazine
★★★★★
Editors' Choice

Super Street Fighter IV Arcade FightStick: Tournament Edition S

$149.99 | Mad Catz | www.madcatz.com

Rating ★★★★★

FORM FACTOR
Feature-wise, the SSFIV Arcade FightStick is virtually a direct carryover of last year's SFIV controller, but its redesigned casing is sleeker and sports new art from Capcom. The Pro.3 SE's design is clean and tasteful, but we love the fan service from Mad Catz.



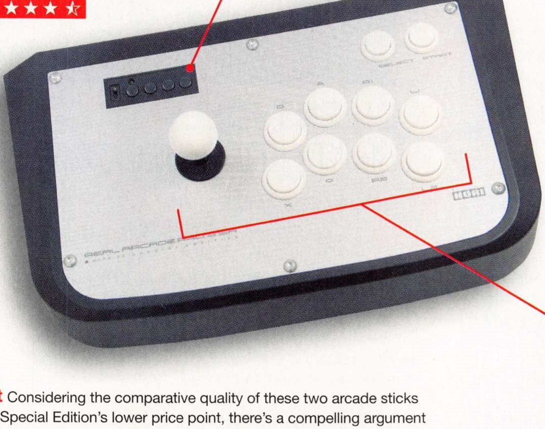
ABLE CABLE
The Pro.3's cable is a generous 9.8 feet, but the FightStick's cable is even longer at 12 feet. And we love Mad Catz's enclosed compartment that stores the cable when the controller's not in use. There's even a notch in the hinged cover so it can fully close when the cable's extended and the unit's in use—very nice.

TURBOCHARGED
The control modules on both units allow you to assign turbo settings to buttons and switch the joystick from digital to Left- or Right-analog control. But the Mad Catz features a locking mechanism that will prevent accidental engagement of the module and—for the first time—the Start and Select buttons.

Real Arcade Pro.3 Special Edition

$119.99 | Hori (USA) | http://www.hori.jp/us/

Rating ★★★★½



PREMIUM PARTS
Both the Arcade FightStick and the Pro.3 Special Edition feature joystick and buttons sourced from Japanese arcade machine manufacturer Sanwa Denshi. The joystick on the Hori offers a bit more aural feedback, but the feel and function of the sticks were nearly indistinguishable.

The Verdict Considering the comparative quality of these two arcade sticks and the Pro.3 Special Edition's lower price point, there's a compelling argument to be made for buying the Hori. But when you're shopping in this high-end class, what's another 30 bucks when it nets you the Arcade FightStick's added dose of personality and attention to detail? PTOM's stick pick is the Mad Catz.

TURBO
SELECT
START
Super Street Fighter IV

↑ Mad Pads

FOUR NEW SUPER DESIGNS

Super Street Fighter IV FightPad

$39.99 | Mad Catz | www.madcatz.com

Rating ★★★★☆

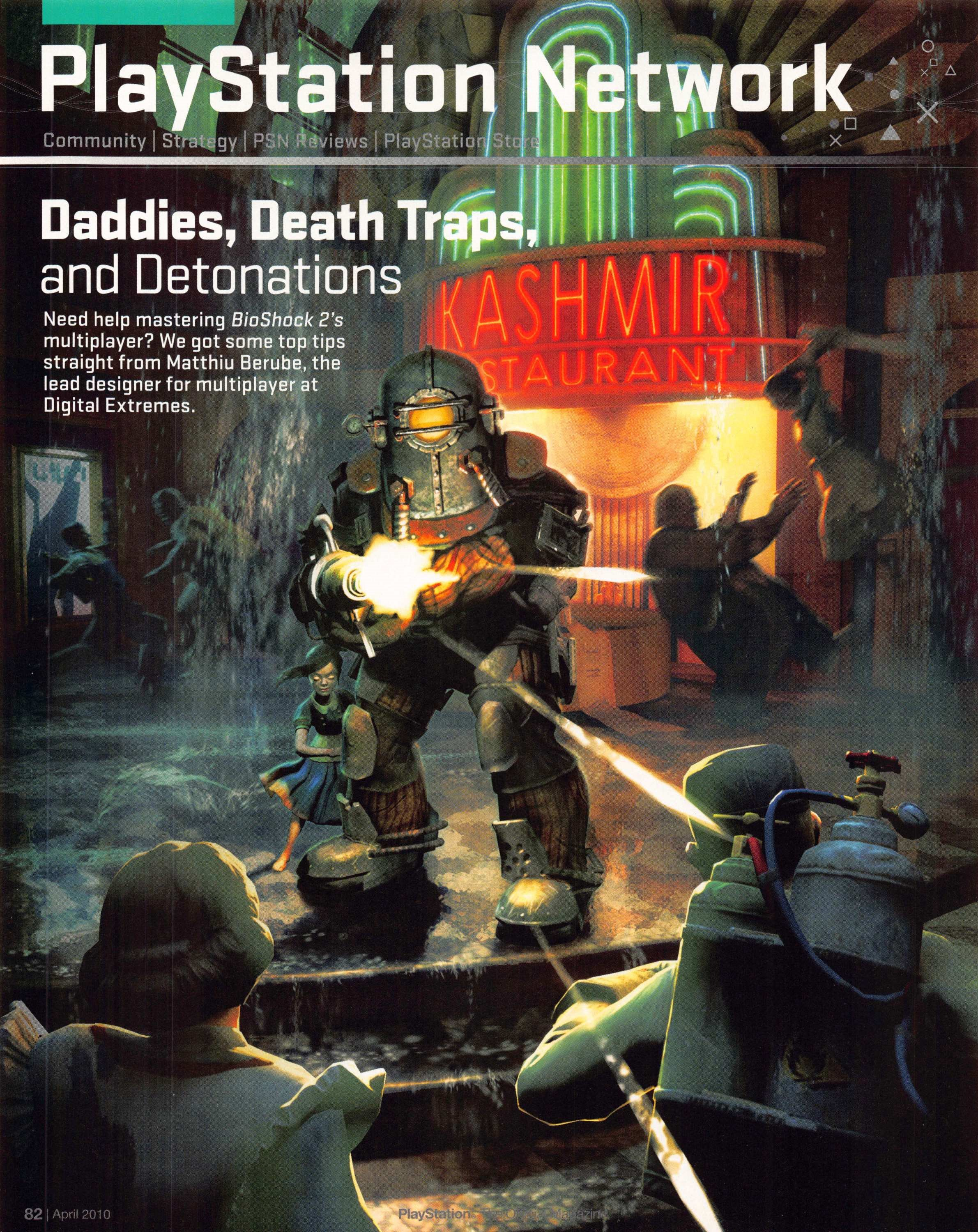
For those who prefer pad controllers to arcade sticks, the FightPad features an eight-way floating D-pad that's a huge improvement over the DualShock's setup. While the six-button sans analog sticks configuration means it'll never be a permanent replacement for the standard PS3 controller, it's great for fighting and retro games. Ken, Ryu, T. Hawk, and Juri are featured on the latest design batch.

THE
MOST FUN
YOU CAN
HAVE WITH
YOUR HANDS
WITHOUT
GOING
BLIND

games
radar.
MORE KICKS PER CLICK

Daddies, Death Traps, and Detonations

Need help mastering *BioShock 2*'s multiplayer? We got some top tips straight from Matthiu Berube, the lead designer for multiplayer at Digital Extremes.



SECRET PLANS

GO SOLO You can launch a private game all by yourself. This allows you to explore the levels and get familiar with them before jumping into the online action. If you pay close attention, chances are you'll also find clues in the environment regarding the events that happened there, like plans to blow up the Kashmir restaurant left in its bathrooms...

SEEING RED A red light indicates a hacked vending machine, which spouts a grenade at your feet when you get close. If you have Telekinesis though, you can turn that to your advantage and grab it before it detonates and throw it at your enemy!

NO RETURNS Enemies using the Resurrection tonic are extremely vulnerable when they resurrect. Finish them off quickly before they rise again!

DEALING WITH DADDIES

MASTER MAGICIAN One of my favorite ways to face off against a Big Daddy in multiplayer is to use the Houdini plasmid to sneak up on him and reveal myself right behind him. I then unload my weapons on him as he tries to turn around while I keep circling—and if I don't get caught I Houdini out of there!

HIVE MIND Bring a friend, and throw bees at the Big Daddy. By messing with his vision and giving him more than one target, he'll have trouble keeping up.

SOUNDPROOFING You'll probably hear the Big Daddy before turning the corner and coming face-to-face with him. When you do, be on the lookout for proximity mines near him and deal with them before they're tripped. Shoot them—or better yet use Telekinesis to grab them, then toss them back at the Big Daddy.

TEAMS AND TURF

BIG ADVANTAGE In Turf War, when your team is lucky enough to get a Big Daddy on their side, he should be able to handle a control point on his own. This frees up the rest of your team to seize/defend the other two locations.

SYNC THINK In Team ADAM Grab, it can be pretty hard to get the opposing team's Little Sister if they're in a strong defensive position. You will need to make sure your entire team attacks at once, from more than one angle if possible.

WEAPONS, PLASMIDS, AND TONICS

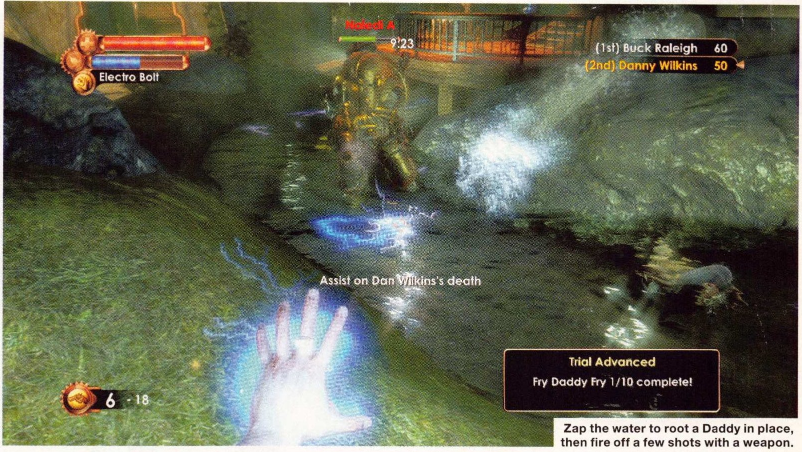
KILLER CROSS The Crossbow really comes into its own once you acquire its Damage Increase upgrade. It's a bit slower, but is a one-hit kill headshot with the Head Hunter tonic equipped, so that's *four* chances per clip. Even if you miss and hit the body, it's still good damage, and finishing off your enemy can be done pretty fast by switching to your second weapon.

TRAP ZAP Be on the lookout for enemies using Geyser Trap to propel themselves to higher ledges. If you're fast enough to land an Electro Bolt shot on them while they're still wet, they'll take heavy damage, and finishing them off will be a breeze.

DEEP ROOTS Electro Bolt basically roots your enemy in place, perfect for quickly lining up a headshot with the Elephant Gun. Need more time? Charge up Electro Bolt to root them in place longer.

NO PAPARAZZI Death Trap is the perfect tonic to make people stop taking research pictures of your corpse. Until they learn to be on the lookout for it, that is...

NEED FOR SPEED If you're planning on using a melee tonic like Back Stabber or Slugger, make sure to also use the Fast Feet tonic so you can rush your enemy faster and more quietly.



Zap the water to root a Daddy in place, then fire off a few shots with a weapon.

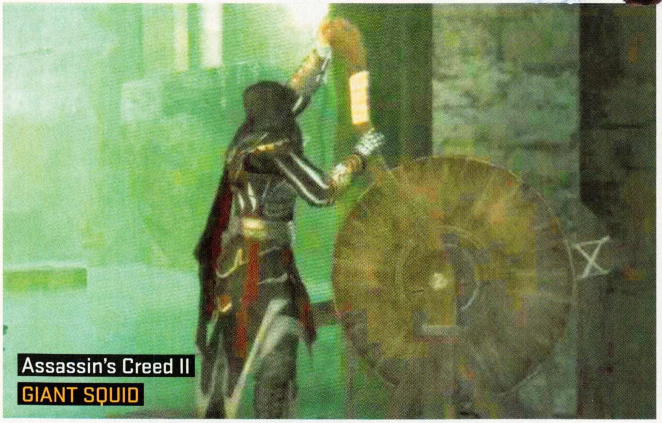
Remember: Always wear safety goggles when blasting your friends into oblivion.

3:37
DEFEND
4.0
0
0
6

Team up and attack from all angles to take down a Daddy protecting a Lil Sis.

Top Secrets

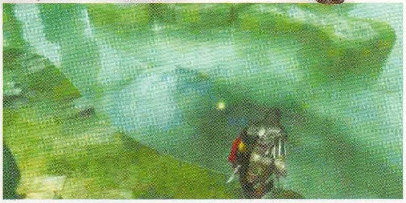
Sure you've played these games, but have you unlocked all their amazing secrets? We expose the PS3's most mind-blowing easter eggs.



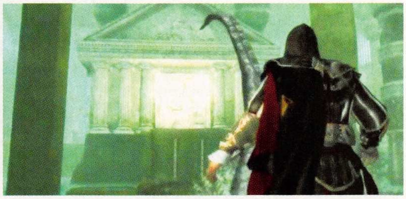
Assassin's Creed II

GIANT SQUID

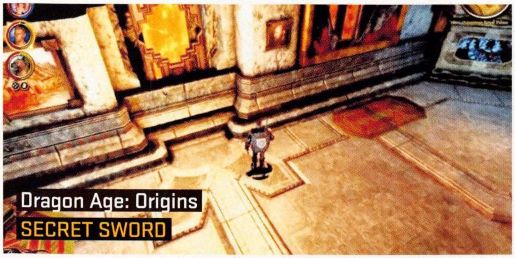
At the final part of the tomb in Santa Maria della Visitazione, use this lever…



Look into the water. Stay motionless and you'll spot a giant squid swimming past.



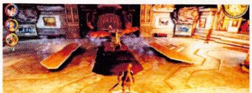
Activate the lever again and a giant tentacle will shoot out of the water.



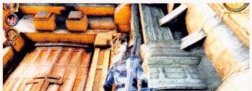
Dragon Age: Origins

SECRET SWORD

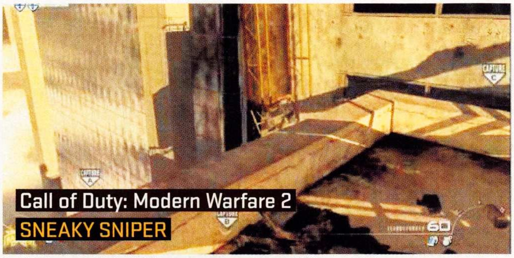
Before picking a new king, head into the Royal Palace in Orzammar with a full party.



Place one party member on each of the three switches. Then, activate the throne.



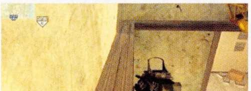
Kill the dragon that appears. You'll get the Ageless Legendary Sword for your trouble.



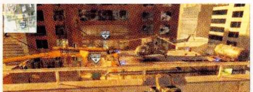
Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2

SNEAKY SNIPER

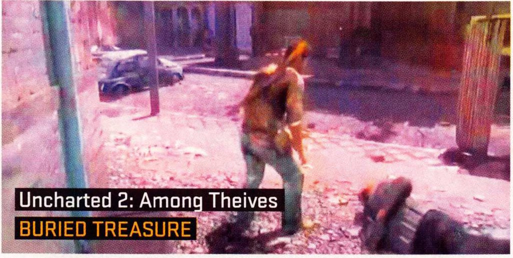
On Highrise, go to the back left corner. Jump over the scaffolding and climb up.



At the top, follow the ledge to another platform. Climb up to the rooftop.



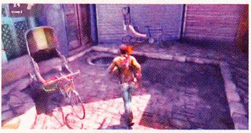
Use Tactical Insertion to respawn at this great sniper spot. Note the teddy bears…



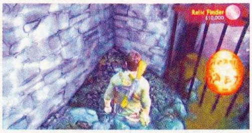
Uncharted 2: Among Theives

BURIED TREASURE

Just like in *Drake's Fortune,* there's a hidden Precursor Orb from *Jak and Daxter*.



In chapter five, climb down from the rooftops and run to the far right corner.



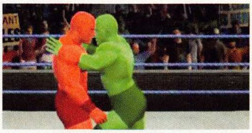
Drop down the open manhole. You'll find the relic in a corner (and earn a Trophy, too).

WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2010

GREEN MACHINE

In week three of Randy Orton's "Road To Wrestlemania" campaign, Cody offers an alliance.

Refuse. Afterwards, when fighting Batista, reverse any three of his attacks.



You'll unlock playable green and red dummies. As if wrestling couldn't get any sillier.

Verse 14
356979

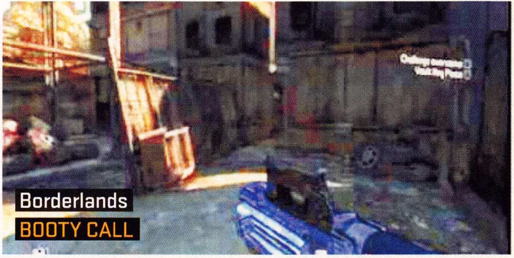
Bayonetta

SEXY DANCING

This is easy enough: just complete the game on any difficulty setting.

You'll be treated to a full-length music video of Bayonetta's sexiest dance moves.

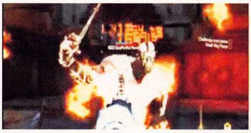
As awesome as that is, it's the music that steals the show. We can't stop listening.



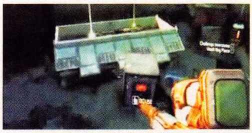
Borderlands

BOOTY CALL

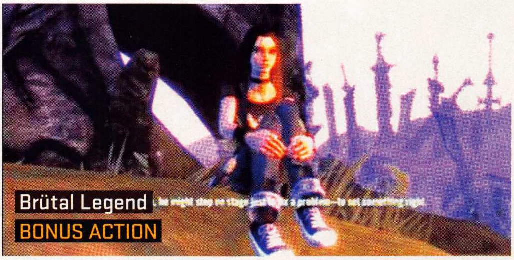
When you get "Another Piece of the Puzzle," go to this house in New Haven.



Take the elevator down to a room full of loot, level-30 mutants, and two weapon crates.



One always contains the "Rider," a gun apparently manufactured by Gearbox.



Brütal Legend

BONUS ACTION

In the final cutscene, you'll see Ophelia sitting near the cross on top of the hill.

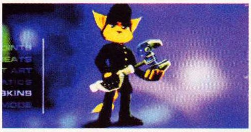
Having completed the game, you're free to explore. Go find Ophelia on the hill.

You have the option to make out with her for all eternity. High five!

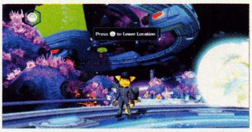
Ratchet & Clank Future: A Crack In Time

SUIT UP

Playing as Ratchet, pause the game and press up, right, down, left, Triangle, Square, X, Circle, R3.



Bancho Ratchet unlocked! It's the winning entry from a skin competition in Japan.



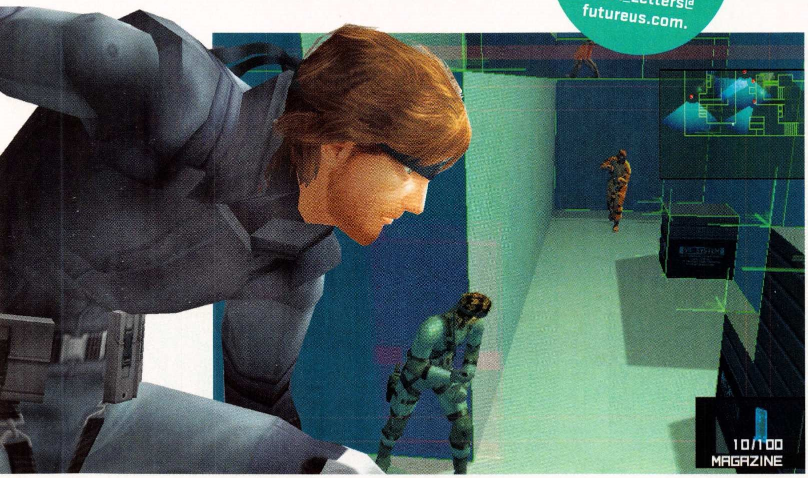
Is he a Japanese gangster or an Elvis wannabe? We like to think a little of both.

ReTrophies: PS2 Edition

Are your PS2 games gathering cobwebs? Our official PTOM Trophies will give you a reason to dust 'em off

It's a lament we've heard all too often: "I *could* go back and play my old games, but why bother if I'm not going to earn any Trophies?" If that's you, well, you may have lost sight of why you play games in the first place, but we hear you just the same. And while PTOM can't slap Trophy support onto your PSone, PS2, and PSP games, we *can* offer up these challenges as an incentive to pull them out of the closet, test your skills, and squeeze every last drop of fun out them. These Officially Unofficial Trophies might be harder to show off to friends, but at least you'll know you did something cool to snag them. For our second ReTrophies installment: a selection of PS2 classics. Hope you've got a few free weeks. | Mikel Reparaz

ARE YOU A RETROPHIES MASTER? Email the details of your awesomeness to PTOM_Letters@futureus.com.



Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty

☐ **Quick Draw** (Bronze) Stun a guard by shooting the punctuation mark over his head.

☐ **Backstabber** (Bronze) Knock out Snake and collect his dog tag.

☐ **Ghost Ship** (Silver) Complete the Tanker mission without being detected or killing anyone.

☐ **Taking Names** (Silver) Collect all dog tags on any difficulty.

☐ **Big Boss** (Gold) Beat the game on Extreme difficulty after unlocking it.

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

☐ **Home Invasion** (Bronze) Steal at least $20,000 in property during burglary missions.

☐ **Cop Killer** (Bronze) Survive a six-star Wanted level for five minutes without cheats.

☐ **All Saints** (Silver) Take over all gang territory in Los Santos.

☐ **Hoarder** (Silver) Find every Oyster, Horseshoe, and Spray Tag in the game.

☐ **California King** (Gold) Finish the game with 100-percent completion.

Final Fantasy X

☐ **Green and Prickly** (Bronze) Complete the Cactuar Catching side-quest on Bikanel Island.

☐ **Lightspeed** (Silver) Complete the Calm Lands Chocobo Race against the trainer with a time of 0:0.0 seconds.

☐ **Linguist** (Silver) Discover all 26 Al Bhed language books.

☐ **Because It's There** (Gold) Finish the game without ever using the Sphere Grid.

☐ **Master of Monsters** (Gold) Challenge and defeat Nemesis at the Monster Arena.

Twisted Metal: Black

☐ **Fairground Fatality** (Bronze) In the Suburbs, crush an enemy with the rolling Ferris wheel after destroying it.

☐ **Good Eye** (Bronze) Shoot down the airplane in the Junkyard stage.

☐ **Big Wheel** (Silver) Finish the story mode with Axel after unlocking him in the Freeway stage.

☐ **Trapped in His Head** (Silver) Beat the story mode with Minion after unlocking him by finishing the game once.

☐ **Gang's All Here** (Gold) Unlock Axel, Yellowjacket, Manslaughter, Warthog, and Minion.

DARKSIDE
01
SPECIAL

03
m31cm9mm
ホンカンカンバン

Katamari Damacy

☐ **Belly Button** (Bronze) Complete the North Star challenge by creating a perfect 10m Katamari.

☐ **While You're At It** (Bronze) Collect all 15 Royal Presents hidden throughout the game.

☐ **Stardust** (Silver) Unlock all 10 Comets by finishing each non-Constellation level within the set time limits.

☐ **Free Roaming** (Silver) Unlock the Eternal Stages by reaching 1m30cm in Make a Star 4, 25m in Make a Star 8, and 800m in Make the Moon.

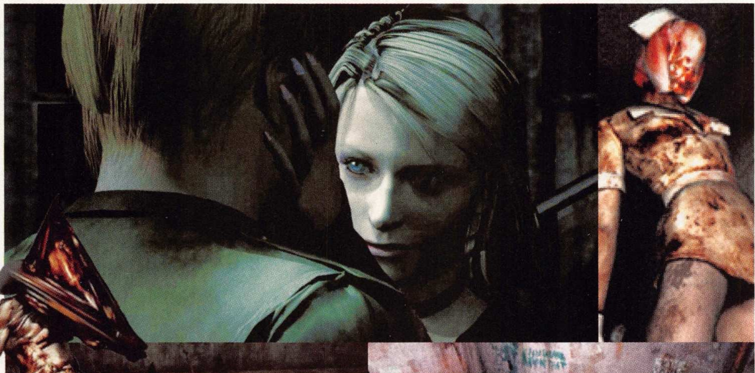
☐ **Stuffed Mushroom** (Gold) Find all 23 hidden Cousins.

Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening

- ☐ **Brawl Master** (Bronze) Unlock the Quicksilver and Doppelganger fighting styles by defeating Geryon and the Doppelganger.
- ☐ **Final Cut** (Bronze) Kill 100 enemies during the end credits to trigger a secret image.
- ☐ **Sleuth** (Silver) Find and complete all 12 Secret Missions.
- ☐ **Survivalist** (Silver) Complete Dante Must Die! mode with an SS rank for every mission.
- ☐ **Unstoppable Badass** (Gold) Finish Heaven or Hell mode with an SS rank for every mission.

Silent Hill 2

- ☐ **It's On Now** (Bronze) Finish the game once and locate the chainsaw after starting a new game.
- ☐ **Marksman** (Bronze) Finish the game using no firearms except the handgun.
- ☐ **See How You Like It** (Silver) Defeat the Pyramid Heads using only the Great Knife.
- ☐ **The Mastermind** (Gold) After finishing the game twice and earning the Rebirth ending, earn the Dog ending on your third playthrough.
- ☐ **This Town Will Win** (Gold) Finish the game on Hard with a 10-star ranking.



Resident Evil 4

- ☐ **Not If I See You First** (Bronze) Kill Dr. Salvador with a sniper rifle without him ever realizing you're there.
- ☐ **Who're Ya Killin'?** (Bronze) Gun down one of the Merchants.
- ☐ **Plagas Collected** (Silver) Complete the Assignment Ada sub-game.
- ☐ **The Missing Pieces** (Silver) Finish all five chapters of Separate Ways.
- ☐ **Army of Five** (Gold) Earn five-star rankings in all four Mercenaries scenarios with all five characters.

Kingdom Hearts

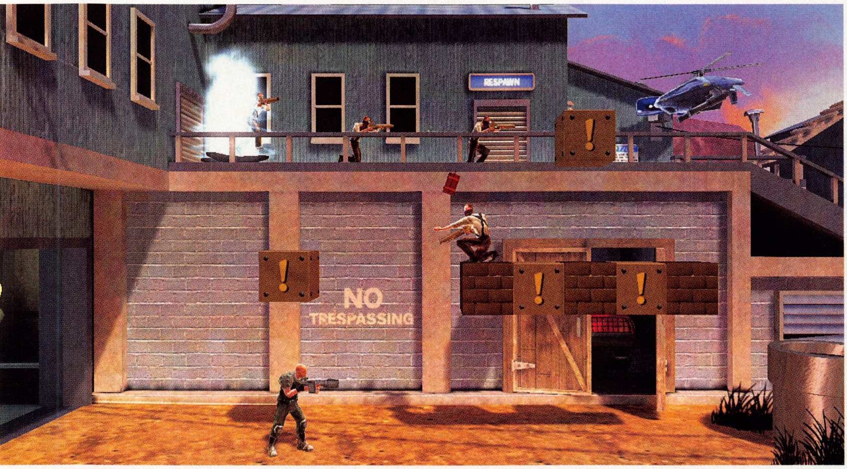
- ☐ **Tarzan Boy** (Bronze) Score all five prizes in the Jungle Slider mini-game.
- ☐ **Reforestation** (Bronze) Find all five Torn Pages to restore the 100 Acre Wood.
- ☐ **Menagerie** (Silver) Unlock and use all six Summons.
- ☐ **Estuans Interius Ira Vehementi** (Silver) Defeat Sephiroth in the Platinum Match at the Coliseum after unlocking it.
- ☐ **Twilight Bark** (Gold) Find all 99 Dalmatian puppies

COMMAND
Attack
Magic
Item
?
COMMAND
Attack
Magic
Charge Up

Shadow of the Colossus

- ☐ **Hey, Let Go!** (Bronze) Ride a bird by sneaking up behind it and pressing R1.
- ☐ **No Remorse** (Bronze) Defeat at least one Colossus in Reminisce mode, triggered by praying next to its corpse.
- ☐ **Well-Equipped** (Silver) Collect all items for defeating the Colossi again in Time Attack mode.
- ☐ **Master Hunter** (Silver) Collect all items for completing Hard Time Attack mode.
- ☐ **Steel Grip** (Gold) Climb your way into the secret garden above the central temple.

PlayStation Network Games



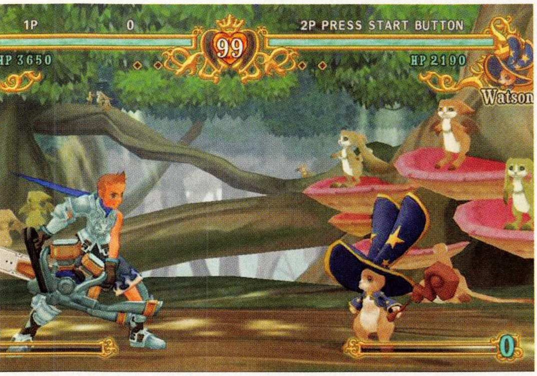
Matt Hazard: Blood Bath and Beyond

PRICE: $14.99 **ESRB:** Mature **PUBLISHER:** D3Publisher **DEVELOPER:** Vicious Cycle

+ *Matt Hazard: Blood Bath and Beyond* suffers from a lot of the same issues that got *Eat Lead* critically panned, and there are moments in the game when the titular hero even jokes about his big console debut tanking. This side-scrolling 2D shooter is loaded with hilarious references that parody many other well known games as much as they poke fun at itself, but it's nearly hamstrung by weak, uninspiring gameplay.

Armed with some of the most standard, unexciting weaponry imaginable and a cavalcade of one-liners, we blasted through level after level indiscriminately slaying anything that moves to stop a wacky villain from destroying our past 8-bit self. The default difficulty is a real bastard. Once we dialed it down, we finally got far enough to experience the many utterly absurd moments that actually make *Blood Bath and Beyond* worth slogging through.

Most levels sport a mash-up of distinct design elements boldly ripped off from other recent popular titles. It's hard not to laugh when thrust into a very *Team Fortress 2*-like stage where we also encountered breakable blocks and warp pipes stolen from the *Super Mario Bros.* series. Throw in plenty of crazy boss encounters—like playing missile ping-pong on the deck of a pirate ship against a giant killer robotic lighthouse—and the game's ridiculousness tips the scale enough to merit our recommendation. | Nathan Meunier



Battle Fantasia

PRICE: $19.99 **ESRB:** Teen **PUBLISHER:** Aksys Games **DEVELOPER:** ARC System Works

+ A talking wizard rabbit, a boy with a flaming chainsaw sword, and a priest who wears short shorts are among the many crazy combatants available in this oh-so-Japanese fighting game. Beautiful artwork and superb style pair well with a new story mode that takes the battling beyond mere fisticuffs. The combat moves may not be as deep or robust as it is in recent full-blown console releases, but that shouldn't stop fighting enthusiasts from getting some solid mileage out of this one. *Battle Fantasia* is a fun and quirky experience. | NM

PSone Fun

Can't miss classics—now available on PSN

PlayStation
FINAL FANTASY VIII
SQUARESOFT

Final Fantasy VIII

PS3/PSP | PRICE: $9.99 | ESRB: TEEN

This masterful epic brought some impressive new elements into the mix and seriously raised the emotional bar for one of the best RPG series around.

PlayStation
DINO CRISIS
CAPCOM

Dino Crisis

PS3/PSP | PRICE: $5.99 | ESRB: MATURE

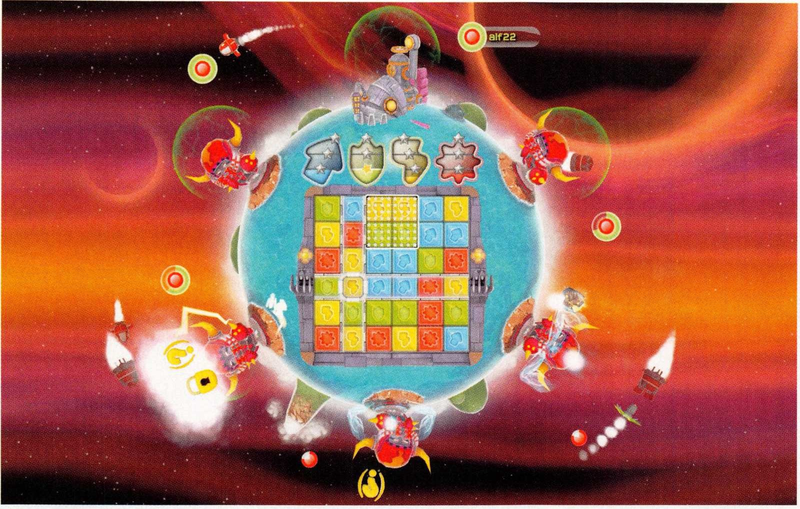
A remote island science compound rife with prehistoric carnivores brings the creepy chills in this survival horror adventure. It's like *Jurassic Park*, but without the suck.

PlayStation
FIGHTING FORCE
EIDOS

Fighting Force

PS3/PSP | PRICE: $5.99 | ESRB: TEEN

This 3D brawler is chock full of flexing muscles and mayhem. The goon-pounding action doesn't require brains to save the world.



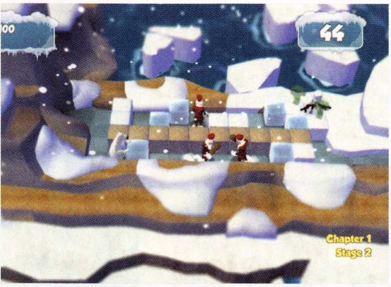
Puzzlegeddon

PRICE: $9.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: Tecmo
DEVELOPER: Pieces Interactive

+ War and leisure make for a great combination. Though the blend of colorful block-matching puzzle gameplay and frantic planetary combat found in *Puzzlegeddon* may seem a familiar formula on the surface, it's more complex and intricate than it initially lets on. Indie dev Pieces Interactive designed this competitive puzzle battler with a strong multiplayer focus in mind, but solo play against bots in custom games is just as fun and satisfying.

The puzzle element involves shifting rows and columns around on a grid to match and clear large numbers of same-colored connected blocks. Successful matches help replenish four meters corresponding to the different colors of blocks that allow you to execute unique offensive and defensive maneuvers when full. While you're quickly trying to make matches to power up your special moves, so are your enemies.

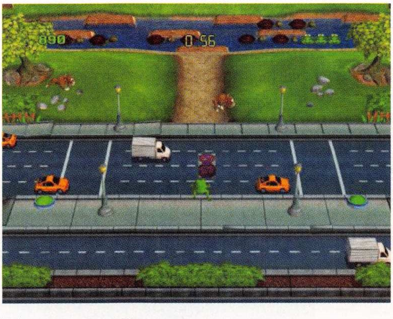
The action gets intense when you're simultaneously sending barrages of missiles rocketing towards foes on opposite ends of the globe while also trying to erect shields and intercept incoming fire from all sides. There's a lot to manage at once, yet it's a blast once you get used to the chaos. | NM



Polar Panic

PRICE: $9.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: Valcon Games
DEVELOPER: Eiconic Games

− *Polar Panic* stars a cute polar bear papa who's focused on crushing nasty trappers and other thugs dressed like Santa with blocks of ice in order to save his kidnapped family. The adorable, nicely drawn cartoonish artwork found in between levels contrasts sharply with the otherwise fuzzy, low-quality graphics in this winter-themed action puzzle game. While the tricky level designs and gameplay have some merit, the presentation is hit-or-miss, making the whole affair feel like a low-budget holiday tie-in title. | NM



Frogger Returns

PRICE: $4.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: Konami DEVELOPER: Hijinx Studios

− Anyone who watches zombie flicks will know bringing the dead back to life isn't always such a swift idea. *Frogger Returns* has the same spirit as the classic game we once loved, but it's an ugly and frustrating mess of a remake. The updated visuals are certainly flashier, but in a scary, unappealing way. The game's four stages are filled with plenty of city drivers, hungry alligators, moonwalking rats, and other dangers attempting to kill you—and they will, over and over again. This is one to avoid. | NM

Play On

Must-have add-ons from the PlayStation Store

Borderlands
Mad Moxxi's Underdome Riot

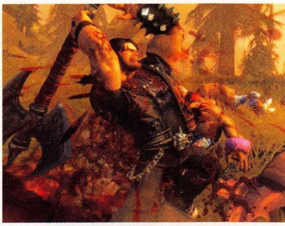
Price: $9.99 | **ESRB:** Mature

Mad Moxxi's co-op arena mode sets the stage for gratuitous killing fun, and the stash box gives you a place to throw all your bountiful loot.

Little Big Planet
Pirates of the Caribbean Costume Pack

Price: $5.99 | **ESRB:** Everyone

As if Sackboy wasn't cute enough, now you can dress him and his cohorts up as the six different characters from Disney's popular pirate flick.



Brütal Legend
Hammer of Infinite Fate

Price: $4.99 | **ESRB:** Mature

New outfits for Eddie, hot paint jobs for The Deuce, a GPS artifact, a doom-emitting projectile weapon, four new multiplayer maps simply scream "must have!"

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE MOTION PICTURE TRILOGY

AVAILABLE: April 6 **GENRE:** Fantasy
STUDIO: New Line / Warner Bros. Digital Distribution

"One Ring to rule them all...and in the darkness bind them."

PSN Video Delivery Service Spotlight

What we're downloading to our PS3 this month

Peter Jackson is going to heaven. No matter what else happens in the accomplished director's life, he's earned a free pass through the pearly gates for his stupendous film adaptation of the epic *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Yes, we've seen the movies numerous times, but it's been far too long since we've journeyed to Middle-earth. Time to once again join Frodo, Sam, Gandalf, Strider, and the rest of the fellowship on their desperate quest to the land of Mordor, where the shadows lie. The *LOTR* trilogy is available for download in standard definition or ooh...sweet HD.

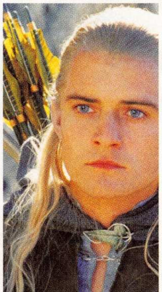
Why We're Watching

The best battle scenes ever... Well, they *could* have been gorier, but that's just our gamer bloodlust talking.

Party time: Call us dazed and confused, but what we wouldn't give to share a few pints of ale and some Longbottom leaf with the lads.

Because: "We wants it, we needs it. Must have the precious. They stole it from us. Sneaky little hobbitses."

No Jar Jar! At least there's one trilogy that's safe from this insidious evil.



Legolas is a badass. But really, it's because Orlando Bloom is the only way our spouses will agree to sit through a *LOTR* marathon.

Top VDS Downloads

MOVIES
- *Saw VI*
- *Michael Jackson's This Is It*
- *Surrogates*
- *Pandorum*
- *The Hangover (Unrated)*

TV SHOWS
- *Smallville: Season 9*
- *The Cleveland Show: Season 1*
- *The Simpsons: Season 21*
- *Family Guy: Season 8*
- *Supernatural: Season 5*

↑ I dunno...they're just more noticeable than I expected. Are you sure these are Invisalign braces?

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Letters

Feedback, Insight, Conspiracies, and 1001 PlayStation Tricks

PlayStation
The Official Magazine
WORLD EXCLUSIVE
GRAN TURISMO 5
NEW! Drive, race, and wreck this Ferrari
GAMES OF THE YEAR
Big winners, bigger surprises!

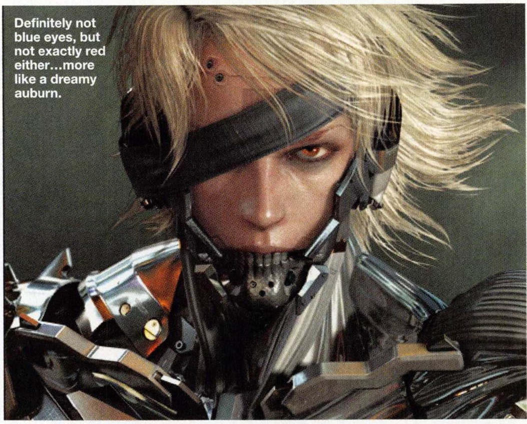
▲ This month's conversation starter

"Oh Kojima, does your awesome trickery know no bounds!?" ➔

SOLID THEORY

My good friend and I consider ourselves to be two of the world's foremost *Metal Gear* experts. As such we LOVE a good conspiracy. Now as every reader of this magazine no doubt has seen, a picture of "Raiden" is used to promote *Metal Gear Solid: Rising.* Or is it Raiden at all? As you my recall Raiden has BLUE eyes whereas the "Raiden" in this picture clearly has RED eyes. HMMM. Also, since when does Raiden have screws in his forehead and a replacement jaw? When you compare pictures of Raiden from *MGS4* to the *Rising* promo picture it becomes very clear. That is not Raiden in that picture!

As *Metal Gear* experts my colleague and I feel very strongly that the mystery man in the picture is none other than Frank Jaeger aka "Gray Fox" himself. If you look at concept art of Frank Jaeger and also his appearance in *MGS: Portable Ops* as "Null," you will see the resemblance between Raiden and Frank Jaeger is uncanny. This of course raises more questions than answers, like why do Raiden and Gray Fox look so similar? Is Raiden a clone of Frank Jaeger like Solid Snake is a clone of Big Boss? And maybe more importantly, how the heck is Gray Fox still alive after that whole stomped-on-by-Metal-Gear-REX thing? Oh Kojima, does your awesome trickery know no bounds!? | *Jared Flewelling, via email*



Definitely not blue eyes, but not exactly red either...more like a dreamy auburn.

Oh, Jared...sometimes a Raiden is just a Raiden—regardless of his choice of colored contact lenses. But we'd love to hear your thoughts on the Kennedy assassination and NBA officiating.

THE WAITING GAME

I can't understand why Sony isn't already offering PS2 games for download on the PS3. To me, this seems like a given—it's an untapped source of instant and guaranteed revenue at almost no cost. What they did with *God of War Collection* is a start, but why exclude so many other great PS2 games, and why not sell them as downloads? Basically, just add Trophies and HD, and I'd be willing to re-purchase many PS2 games. | *Ted Whitten, Tucson AZ*

We get lots of letters decrying the absence of PS2 games on PSN, but think of all the great games that

Send your comments to PTOM_Letters@futureus.com. Send gifts to PTOM, 4000 Shoreline Ct., Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. 'Cause we like presents.

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LETTER OF THE MONTH

FUNCTION JUNCTION

Years after buying my PS3 and PSP, I'm still impressed with how useful they are in my daily life, beyond movies and games. Here are a few examples:

Last year, my wife and I bought my parents a PS3 for Christmas, since they love movies and because they live across the country and can't see our daughter often. We have regular online video chats, and my daughter can play violin for them live, show them her drawings, etc. It's a great way for our families to get together.

The other day, my wife's computer crashed and I needed to find something to transfer Internet files from my computer to hers. Her computer doesn't accept the flash memory cards I normally use, only USB. I remembered my PSP and copied everything I needed to it, then transferred through a USB connection. It worked out perfectly.

↙ Gary: In his younger, more idealistic days.

would be lost in the shuffle/deluge if the entire PSone and PS2 libraries became available at once. But while Sony hasn't indicated that they're going to make PS2 games available for download, we'd be surprised if they didn't at some point. Meanwhile, we wouldn't mind another *Collection*—perhaps *ICO* and *Shadow of the Colossus* since *Last Guardian* is coming?

STREAMING FEEDBACK

In the Holiday 2009 issue of PTOM, there was a letter about using Windows Media Player and PS3 Media Server (which I've used for quite a while now) to stream media from a PC to a PS3. One major point of interest about PS3 Media Server that was completely missed was the fact that .MKV files in particular are able to be saved/copied to the PS3 hard drive, no matter how big or small they are. This is great because it completely removes the problem of stuttering that can happen while streaming video.

The other thing of note is that if for some reason a video file won't play normally, you can have the program transcode on the fly by opening the "Transcode" folder on your PS3 and selecting one of the three or more versions for each video. The only drawback to this is the fact that the processors may not be able to cope with the extra stress, causing the video to become unwatchable due to extreme stuttering. | *Willie Z., Indianapolis IN*

Thanks, Willie. We love it when readers send in tech tips based on their real-world experiences. Keep 'em coming.

STEINMAN CHRONICLES TOO

When I read that Gary was coming back, it felt great! The power of PTOM was too great for him to remain at *PC Gamer* and he's come back to his rightful place. The timing couldn't be better with a game like *Valkyria Chronicles 2* coming to PSP soon—we all know how much Gary loved the first one. I definitely expect Gary to review *VC2* and that's one game that's already on my "must buy" list. | *Sean, via email*

Valkyria Chronicles certainly ranks as a PTOM favorite and it's a game that received far too little love and attention in the retail space. While we can't guarantee that Gary will be reviewing the game (that's schedule and workload dependent), he is looking forward to returning to Gallia—if he's not too busy reading all his bromantic fan mail.

UNCHARTED TERRITORY

I thought I had it all figured out: I bought a copy of *Uncharted 2*, invited my hot girlfriend over, and started to play. But within minutes she snagged the controller out of my hand and now I'm forced to sit and watch her play the game for hours on end. I mean it's visually amazing and all, but when's it going to be my turn? | *Daniel Kizlyk, Edmonton AB, Canada*

C'mon, Daniel—'fess up. You don't really have a hot girlfriend, do you? It was your sister. It's okay buddy, your turn will come.

SUCKS TO BE YOU

I literally just spent ONE-AND-A-HALF HOURS downloading the free *MAG* beta, only to discover that it expired on January 10 at 11:59 p.m. I am so pissed because it's 12:45 a.m. on January *11* as I'm writing this email! | *Alex Smith, Canada*

NO, REALLY, GET NEW FRIENDS PT. II

I've got this friend who hasn't touched his PS3 in over four months (I know this because of the latest system update) and every time I suggest some games for him, he just goes all, "No, I hate it." He even hates all the great games he's never played, like *Killzone 2, Dragon Age: Origins,* and *CoD: Modern Warfare 2*. I even had to force him to watch the 2009 VGA's so I could say, "Look, *Uncharted 2* won Game of the Year—is it good enough for you now?" and he still refuses to try any of these games. If you had friends like this, what would you do? | *Jett Supler, via email*

NO COMMA-ENT

I just earned my 1000th Trophy and as I went to check my PSN card to savor the moment, I was devastated to see that there was no comma to separate the "1" from the zeros. Without the comma the numbers get boggled together and quickly lose their value. The organization that a comma provides makes the numbers orderly and readable. Please, give us back our comma. | *Jason, via email*

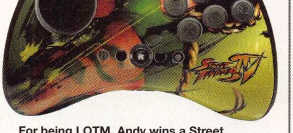
My wife loves watching TV shows from her country, but they aren't broadcast in the U.S. Instead of having to watch them online through her laptop, we can watch them online through the PS3 on our big TV.

I'm a music teacher (guitar), and some of my students have a PS3, so when they are sick or can't come for their private lessons, we meet online and the high speed of the PS Eye is fast enough that their movements are synchronized with the sound and I can conduct the lesson as well as if I were there in person.

Both the PS3 and PSP have become rather permanently integrated into my life, and are excellent examples of how PlayStation technology has changed and improved my family's lifestyle.

Oh, and no, I don't work for Sony. | *Andy Mitchell, via email*

Sometimes we become so fixated on the PS3's and PSP's gaming function, we overlook their incredible versatility and range of capabilities. We love the innovative ways that Andy integrates his systems into his life, and now he can add "PTOM's Letter of the Month" to his list of PlayStation accomplishments.



For being LOTM, Andy wins a Street Fighter IV Arcade FightPad courtesy of Mad Catz (www.madcatz.com).

↑ In Motion

In our Holiday 09 issue, we asked readers to submit name suggestions for Sony's motion controller. Here are the best submissions and our take:

Sony Pure Motion controller
– Clown
Not bad. Probably need to make it one word though so it looks all brand official: PureMotion™

The Sony Scepter
– Archie Harpell
Is that a controller in your pocket or are you just happy to see us?

Sony MotionStick
– Brian Miller
Simple, tight, to the point. A definite contender.

The XYZ controller
– Isaiah Crawford
We get the whole multi-dimensional angle, but the name hurts our brains.

The Edge controller
– Caleb Heggie
It's edgy, but when you say something's edgy, it's not really edgy is it?

XVIZZION
– Edwin A Guardado
Um, what? Are you an Xbox fan or somethin'?

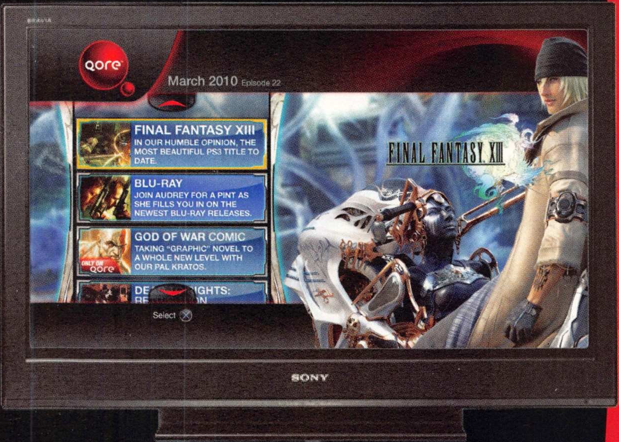
PTOM's attempt:
The eMotion controller
Yeah, we know, so corporate-bland. But we ain't gettin' paid for this.

Presented by the PlayStation®Network

Qore host Veronica Belmont

QORE EPISODE 22

Featuring Final Fantasy XIII, Dead to Rights: Retribution, God of War Comic, and a surprise!



FINAL FANTASY XIII
IN OUR HUMBLE OPINION, THE MOST BEAUTIFUL PS3 TITLE TO DATE.

BLU-RAY
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GOD OF WAR COMIC
TAKING "GRAPHIC" NOVEL TO A WHOLE NEW LEVEL WITH OUR PAL KRATOS.
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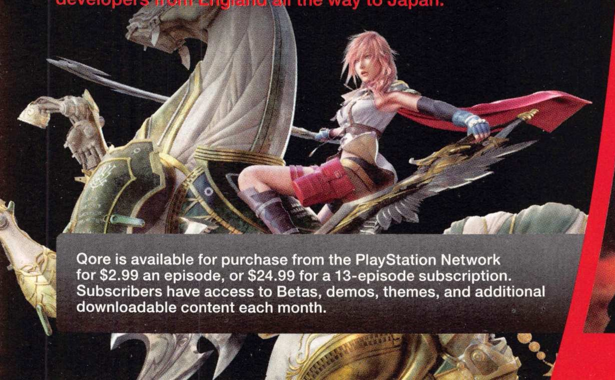
We're heading into March like a lion, as they say, with info on the hottest games coming to your PS3. We made good use of our frequent flier miles too, visiting developers from England all the way to Japan.



Qore is available for purchase from the PlayStation Network for $2.99 an episode, or $24.99 for a 13-episode subscription. Subscribers have access to Betas, demos, themes, and additional downloadable content each month.

AVAILABLE NOW!
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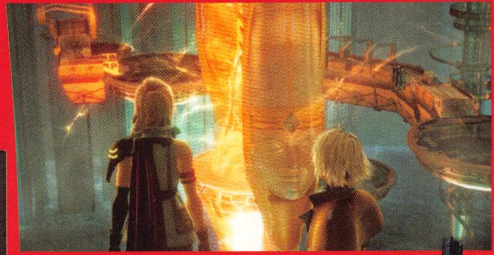
Featuring

Final Fantasy XIII

The latest chapter in arguably the most beloved RPG series of all time, *Final Fantasy XIII* has had us waiting on pins and needles for its release. Now that it's finally here, we can say the wait was more than worth it. From unbelievable graphics to characters you'll certainly come to love, this epic role-playing adventure has it all. Is this the best *Final Fantasy* game ever? We've got the answer.



Dead to Rights: Retribution

Jack Slate and his doggie pal Shadow return in this reimagining of 2002's *Dead to Rights.* Volatile Games has put together quite a dark and gritty game here, and reveals to us the six degrees of noir in *Dead to Rights: Retribution.*

God of War Comic

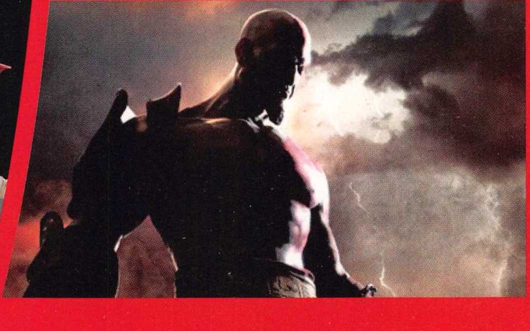
Some games just are too big to live on a console alone! Audrey Cleo talks shop with writer Marv Wolfman. Even better, we've got an exclusive excerpt from the comic itself!

Blu-ray Roundup

Qorespondent Audrey Cleo brings you the next wave of big-name Blu-ray releases heading for your PlayStation 3.

And a little surprise...

We've got the first look at one of the year's hottest games—that hasn't even been *announced* yet. You don't want to miss this one!



Photograph by Mark Madeo

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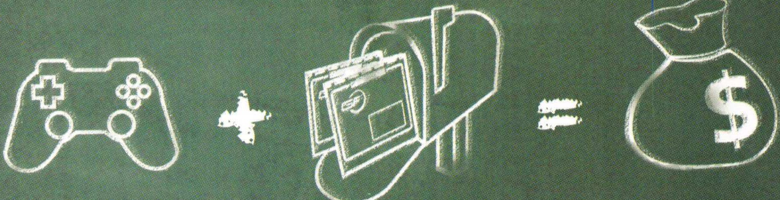

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M
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Intense Violence
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PS3 PlayStation 3 PlayStation Network

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